DAWN'S LEFT HAND

DOROTHY RICHARDSON

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"The heroine of Miss Richardson's great work has an identity so real. It is hard to think of any woman in fiction more living, more real. In all the literary work of our time none retains so high, so rare, so curious a value. People who have read with anything approaching a temperamental affinity find themselves bitten with an insatiable mania for her writing. She is profoundly English. Certainly she is one of the master-realists of our tongue. Like all great writers, she really and truly creates a completely new world, even while she feels that she is simply expressing the truth."

JOHN COWPER POWYS

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Chapter-Volumes in PILGRIMAGE

By Dorothy M. Richardson

POINTED ROOFS
BACKWATER
HONEYCOMB
THE TUNNEL
INTERIM
DEADLOCK
REVOLVING LIGHTS
THE TRAP
OBERLAND
DAWN'S LEFT HAND

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By

DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON

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To

VIOLET

HE had said *the* train, as if there were no other. It must be the one great train of the night, the Paris train, that was to be an hour late.

" Confound it ! " she said fervently into the darkness in the manner of a travelling Englishman faced with delay that to her was nothing but reprieve ; a whole extra hour in Oberland. Of which a fraction must be spent in carrying the news to the group still standing in the lamplight at the far end of the platform ; meekly.

She sped along, feeling the sharp air expand once more limitlessly across the snows to which she had said farewell, and began speaking, as soon as they were near enough to hear, in the free-masonish Oberland way of addressing strangers as if they were old friends. They turned their three heads as she reached them on the end of her communication ; but absently, as if being interrupted, and showing that they had heard only by turning again towards each other, and that they were not of the Oberland world by consulting in murmurs.

Two small women, shapeless with wraps, and a man rather tall and with a customary importance in his bearing, but standing with the women in an equality of sincere attention towards the discussion.

She waited a moment, not to miss the chance of a belated response, but when she turned away was glad of their negligence that set her free to attend only to the mountain air.

But her spirit turned out to be already in London, refusing to come back to the enchantment of which it had taken leave and watching, as she went, for the lit opening of the waiting-room, and presently welcoming the sound of following footsteps.

They sat down on the far side of the room, a party of conspirators. But speculating towards her, towards the fact, pathetic or improper, of her sitting there alone at midnight. Probably, since she attacked strangers so freely, improper.

She felt them pitiful, living suspiciously outside the world of universal urbanity, and turned to the nearer wall-posters, glaring in the half-light, for response to the jovial remarks that rose in her mind : their imagined cheerful sound making perfect the spectacle of the cautiously murmuring group.

The man was crossing the room. Aloof and graceless in a stout top-coat, he demanded whether she were going through to London, and at once went away with her answer, and the murmuring began again.

Contemplating without looking at them and yet unable to escape the spectacle without either closing her eyes or gazing at the floor or ceiling, it seemed to be in the very person of Mr. Orly, seated at the lunch-table in the bare-walled basement room at Wimpole Street where the confronted lunchers were, beyond the dishes on the table and the unvarying lights and shadows made by the electric light, the only external refuge for unpreoccupied eyes, that she gazed upwards and mentally emitted his humorously despairing sigh, glancing at the same time sideways-down at herself seated at his right hand and just growing aware of the meaning, for him and from his point of view, of one of his kindly sarcasms and yet obstinately set against admitting any justification for it, desperately refusing to show any sign of awareness and choosing rather to appear idiotic and justify his sigh than to give him the satisfaction of seeing her look " rather sick."

She remembered saying to Michael in a

voice almost trembling with indignation: "One *moment* of my consciousness is wider and deeper than his has been in the whole of his life." And the grave conviction of Michael's "Most-certainly," made all the more comforting by the way the note of shocked amusement in his voice had suggested that the warmth of her statement was waste of emotion.

And now the statement itself seemed meaningless. Monstrous. It was not true that Mr. Orly's consciousness was less deep and wide than hers but simply that like all true Oberlanders he was unconscious of his consciousness. Had been trained away from it. A kind of salvation. But what is the use of an unconscious salvation? Insecure. Depending upon being always surrounded by an unvarying world. . . .

When at last the sounds outside announced the train that would set going again the unsuspicious movement of life, the little group of conspirators followed her on to the platform and she found, turning round from hoisting her things into the rack of her chosen compartment, the smaller woman within the carriage and her friends, taking leave from the

platform, audible as New Englanders with quiet, unsmiling voices.

The train started, carrying her and the small woman off together into the long night. In spite of the meagre promise, she found herself back within the warmth of shared life. Flowing through her, it gave eagerness to her hands as they attacked the fastenings of her coat whose removal was part of the prelude to a social evening.

Perhaps the woman did not mean to talk. But even if she were silent, her presence would keep the whole world in the carriage.

She had turned away from the window and its view of the departing platform and now, with head bent to unfasten her neat veil, fell into speech as if her farewells had interrupted a conversation already set going. Miriam hurried her preparations to be seated and at leisure, hearing for the present little more than the quality of the woman's speech, the wide New England vowels that always reminded her of sounds heard long ago, she could not tell where ; and being confirmed in her first impression of the group on the platform by the way the inflections of her voice had been subdued, by the life she had led, almost to a

monotone. It came forth, without emphasis and without colour, from the world in which she lived, a world that had never been made strange to her by any sort of astonishment over the fact of its being there at all. The very way she took off her wrappings seemed to say that everyone had the same clothes, and the same way with their clothes.

She came to the middle of the carriage and sat down under the central light to attack her boots, a small, shrivelled woman all grey ; grey cardigan and neat grey skirt, grey hair, sallow thin face and faded eyes, expressionless. A fading life. As she moved about the carriage making her preparations for the night, her movements were lissome but had exactly the same expression as her speech. Wonderful to watch. But she would have laughed, if she could laugh, at the idea of their being wonderful to watch. She was following the set shape of her life with a sort of uninspired gusto that had nothing to do with the unique quality of the passing moment. Did not seem to know that moments were passing and her life passing : her uniformly unsolitary life of the transatlantic spinster, enclosed in uniformity even when she was travelling in Europe.

She finished her discourse with her preparations and neatly composed herself for sleep on her side of the carriage without good-night. The world, hidden under a neat grey rug.

Miriam's attention dropped backwards away from her across the brief conversation to which she now heard her own voice contributing warm eagerness that of course the little grey woman had not found attractive because it was centred not upon the items but upon the prospect of getting away behind items. She took refuge with the two left behind at Berne to go on with their enchanting task. Why did not English teachers have a sabbatical year, go abroad and lose themselves in strangeness and come back renewed ? Why not everyone ?

Already the little woman was asleep. She slept through the night and until the early grey began, announcing Paris at hand, and when Miriam moved to raise herself through the worst of her fatigue before the voice should begin, it sounded at once. Easy words speaking her way of being, describing her way of coming from the depths of sleep full-grown at once into her level way of life. Driving away, in advance, the sound of the stillness and the light, the richness of the gold that would follow

the morning grey, and all the beauty of remembered Paris. To this woman Paris would be only Paris, in whatever way she had of perceiving it, not a part of something hidden within herself and suddenly revealed.

She talked undaunted by groans and irrelevant statements, as if reciting : a fluent stream of well-worn words dying unconsidered into each other. Miriam's own voice breaking forth, as movement restored her strength, in staccato English, sounded, in comparison, like song. Urbanity was failing at its first test. She wanted to silence this woman and attend to all that was being driven away. And each time she spoke she knew she was carolling her own advantage of youth and high spirits over one not yet alive, and already too far down life's hill really to live.

They were ready to leave the train now slowly moving through Paris grey in mist. The little spinster was unmoved in becoming surrounded by Paris. Yet only a few months ago she had seen Paris and London for the first time.

"Didn't you find London very small and flat?"

"*Mercy*, no."

She had spoken almost warmly, and went on to explain that this time she meant to see all over England before going home for her marriage in June. The train stopped. But neither that nor her astounding announcement made any break in her discourse.

Meekly Miriam followed the bride-to-be out into the morning twilight of the great station, where she looked smaller, older. But over herself and her neat belongings played a golden radiance from her far-off prospects.

Paris was breakfast in the station hotel, and a drive to another station and the finding of another train. But again, prevailing over the ceaselessly talking little woman, the charm of it, lying all about her in the busy daylight, challenged the mountains, as it had challenged before she had seen them, and won. And the little woman at her side, intent on her uniform world, was part of the prevailing.

And when they parted in the blackness of Newhaven, she felt bereft. For a moment she stood still in nothingness beneath the sky so strangely large and empty. Just behind it the mountains were hidden. They filled her eyes, but only for an instant, leaving her alone upon the airless lowlands.

FOR these three, the time she had spent living out in Oberland a golden life within her life had been just a fortnight of dark London days leading towards spring. Each morning they had come unenviously downstairs to find again, behind the small disturbances and adjustments that disturbed them so little, their sense of untroubled everlastingness. Helped by the warmth of their clear fire that always looked wide, in spite of the narrow, villa grate.

Its glow brightened the frosty sunlight coming in above the little hedges of dense snowy-white lace set along the lower halves of the windows and giving the heavy curtains each side the small bay their rich warmth.

They were all eager to go on with their experiences, backwards, from last night's story of the return journey, into the life preceding it. At leisure. There it all lay, represented by her presence. Awaiting the time when every-one should have been carefully provided. Meantime, the to and fro of needful words, the sight of their morning eyes, fresh and dark in their familiar faces, the long, good moments into which flowed the refreshment of their rich serenity, deepened this morning by their sense of entertainment ahead.

They were eager, not through insufficiency but because of their sufficiency that survived Florrie's hopeless engagement, Grace's wrecked romance and Mrs. Philps's large experience of "trouble," unchanged.

And yet, she reflected, taking in the new, plain wallpaper upon which their heavily gilt-framed, old-fashioned pictures stuck out with an uneasy prominence, with its narrow, gay frieze of sunlit landscape, they particularly liked "to march with the times." But only because within all times, however new, they found what already they possessed, over which time had no power. Yet this morning they were a fortnight older than when she had seen them last, a fortnight nearer death, of which they always spoke with grave horror and dilated eyes.

But she could imagine each one of them recovering at the end, with a secret, unseen smile of surprise behind the externals that in the deaths of others so horrified them, this unassailable happy serenity of being of which they were so unaware and that made the background of life in their company a single continuous moment troubled only now and again by the

remembrance of their unconsciousness of its perfection.

Her experience was passing over to them. They were up amidst the sunlit snows, meeting her friends, realising them in their direct, changeless way ; making allowances for her enthusiasm, yet loving it, welcoming each word and seeming to be waiting for her at every point of her journey through her so different life. As if prepared for each experience in advance, and yet seeming not to see, as they accompanied her into a life that for them was new and strange, how very strange was any life at all.

Perhaps it was just their unquestioning acceptance that made life flow from them so strongly that most of her friends seemed, by comparison, uncreated. In some essential way. In the way the innocent Croydon family and the innocent people at the Alpenstock had made them seem uncreated. And yet these uncreated friends would dispose of these three and of the Croydoners and Alpenstockers in a single generalisation. . . .

Wandered too far into the contemplation of incompatibles that was the everlastingly disturbing background of social life, she felt the

threads of her discourse slipping away and looked across at the row of little villas on the other side of the road, the unchanging outposts of her life in this secluded room, and found them *changed*. And turned back to the table to finish the picture of the ski-contest with the magical strangeness of the villas before her eyes within the background of the scene she was contemplating. Behind the black-clothed figure of the bird-man, poised, with out-flung arms moulded by close-clinging, soft black sleeves from shoulder to glove, for a second against the sky's brilliant blue above the glistening snow-slope, was the vision of these little houses, that once had seemed so sharp in outline, blurred to softness by the English air so that their edges seemed actually to *waver* upon it.

The excitement of the discovery of their new individuality broke into her voice, enlivening it as she finished her sketch, so that the three listeners were the more moved by what they were seeing ; sharing her emotion, without knowing that it arose from the recognition of the gentle mistiness, even in bright sunlight, of English outlines.

Strange and delightful that this simple discovery should be so moving as to seem in itself

enough as a result of foreign travel and should go on, while the general to and fro of remarks was assailing her attention, wrapping her in a happiness that thrilled through her voice which was now claiming her attention for its own quality grown strange : sounding the gentle south of England, the west country, too, perhaps, of her family's origin, and the large-gardened, uncrowded south-western suburbs – as so often, before, she had heard it sound here in the alien north, where voices grated even at their gentlest and bore, for all occasions, a bared and cutting edge ; but without recognition of its essentials beyond the flattering assurance that she herself belonged to a superior, more cultivated way of being ; the way of being that amongst the Oberlanders had been all about her and of which at this moment she was being aware as clearly as of the misty English villas as it made, on her behalf, within the inflections of her voice, statements clearer than any spoken words, enchanting and delighting her as she was delighted and enchanted by the people she loved, giving her a thrilling certainty as to the unseen future, shaming her into the knowledge that in her case they were unjustifiable, that she had grown level with

almost none of them, and yet lending their quality to every word she spoke.

Returning, she looked forth at strangers still radiating delight, still sounding their alien voices and making hers sound in response and again proclaim itself a barrier and yet the vehicle of her everlasting communion with them ; of her prevailing with them by virtue of the echo within it of the way of being from which it had come forth.

They were hovering now between their desire for more talk and the pull of the shape of their day. The freshness of the breakfast-hour was over, the scene drawing to its end, each member of the party moving away into the depths of her secret, separate existence. Her own claimed her, to the new gay undertone that presently in the open she would hear more clearly.

AND going down into town for her delayed luggage she heard it everywhere. In everyone about her was hilarity, deep-seated ; in every-one moving in the open, though not on holiday.

It was there even in the worried and the sorrowful, the creator of their worry and their sorrow.

Inside the clangorous great station the secret joy palpitated in the exciting, metal-smelling air like the beating of wings. It emanated even from those who were setting out, deedily, only for suburbs, and reached and transformed every hideous object within their sight.

Joy is eternity. Eternity is joy. In railway-stations and in trains people enter perforce their own eternity. So that men, even when faced with disaster, so long as they can move from place to place and get away into eternity, are commonly more cheery than women, though unaware of what it is that makes them so.

In Oberland the eternal being of woman is an escorted procession. Its men are trained to pay homage to the giver of life and the pain-bearer. They seek eternity in the Services, in hobbies, in art or science, games. And never consciously find it. Their bondage to the womanly woman is a life-bondage, to eternity personified.

The jingling hansom was carrying her back to her London, filled with people to whom the golden eternity had been just fourteen

" ordinary " days and who, knowing nothing of the change in her that at present seemed to be everlasting, would endanger and perhaps destroy it. She wished she could hand them, like a certificate, at least her record of social success. They would misinterpret. Amongst them all only Hypo would understand. He would say, to demonstrate his insight, " You've been flattered, my dear, by kindly people at loose ends, to the top of your bent. You're a little drunk with it all. I'm not objecting to that. Good for you, good for everybody, once in a way," and, having protested, begin his own subtle, but still quite obvious flattery, for his own ends. But he would understand that discovery about oneself is impersonal, as well as personal, like a discovery in chemistry.

Piecemeal, everything piecemeal. What Oberland had been, apart from people, no one would ever know. Yet its beauty had entered into her for ever ; its golden glow must surely somehow reveal itself. It lay even over the nauseating forgotten detail of Flaxman's now rapidly approaching.

The cab drew up at the mouth of the court. At number two, Perrance filled the doorway, one of the wings of his grime-stiffened cape

brushing the jamb as he slouched through on his way to his basement. The unchanged sights of the court seemed, as she entered it, to re-open the door just slammed by Perrance, to deny her absence and promise speedy obliteration of her memories and destruction of her renewed strength.

Together with the reek pouring from the opened door came the rebuff of the narrow staircase up which the weedy cabman might refuse to carry her luggage. Her mind refused to centre on this difficulty. Beyond it, waiting for her upstairs, was not the Flaxman life grown unendurable, but renewal and continuation of the golden glow.

Turning from the door to the empty court, she met the blue-eyed friendly glance of a neat working-man, not a Flaxmanite, seeming as he responded without a word to her confident question and went about her business serenely, as if it were his own, the first of a procession of friends emerging from the future.

Selina was out. But the rooms were filled with the dry, sweet fragrance of mimosa. Once, only once, she had told Selina that the scent of mimosa in a wintry room said, each year, that life is summers. Selina had missed her; was

offering from her side of the curtain that for so long had seemed the embodiment of their incompatibility, this tribute to their early days.

A pile of letters. Tributes to Oberland, to Oberland past and her return to London accomplished. But alone up here she had no sense of return. The memories accumulated since she landed were like a transparent film through which clearly she saw all she had left behind ; and felt the spirit of it waiting within her to project itself upon things just ahead, things waiting in this room as she came up the stairs. To open all these letters and drop into communication with the lives they represented would be to divert its course.

Graceless she felt, ungrateful, and could not care. Even Hypo's thin grey envelope failed to bring the usual electric shock. It stood out from the others only because her detailed response to it preceded perusal. With planned cunning, he had chosen this moment for one of his concentrated attacks ; the obvious moment ; the wrong moment ; showing him as he was alone in himself, far-off, irrelevant to personal life. And except for her annoyance with his planned persistence, she felt him stand, compared to the vast strange promise within,

in an equality of indifference with all these others. It was only, she thought, as she sat down to open his letter, with the unlocated being of these people that she desired communication and not at all with the sight and sound of their busy momentary selves.

"*Welcome to your London, my dear. I'm more in love with you than ever.*"

When she reached the small interwoven capitals forming the signature she felt herself returned from flight, unawares, towards a far distance and felt the strong beating of her heart quieten before a vision of this shapely device, so deftly continuing and completing the design of the written lines, set down, in a kind of sincerity, beneath innumerable documents such as this.

He was "in love" in his way; once again. But behind the magic words was nothing for her individually, for anyone individually. And his brilliance, the mental qualities she had hitherto found so full of charm, had somehow, unaccountably, become overshadowed. She no longer felt the importance of trying to find forms of expression for alternative interpretations of his overpowering collection of facts.

She felt at this moment that any interpretation was preferable to his and no plan at all better than even the most workable of plans born of the assumptions science was helplessly forced to make. He was offering a stone, a precious stone ; but there might be bread waiting hidden in the world whose approaching distances seemed no longer filled only with queer irregular people who held most others in scorn.

She flicked the card, whose wording he had already forgotten, between thoughtful fingers : momentary purpose and plan, converging upon what she had seemed to be a fortnight ago. Supposing a kindly Philistine, with a fixed world and almost no imagination, were in his place ? Impossible. Breathlessly impossible. Philistines or intellectuals . . . is there no alternative ? Nobody, nobody. She wanted nobody she already knew. But did she wish him away ? Or even averted ? Only for a while forgotten. And that he could be, since he was fixed, in his place, far away.

Sure of possessing the immediate future, clear of obstacles and with the golden glow undimmed above it, she turned to the other letters and found amongst them one from Alma which somehow she had passed over. The

sight of it drew all the rest together, making them seem like the various flowers of a single bunch and rebuking, as if it were a living presence, her desire to escape from their friendly challenges. She hesitated before submitting herself to the always strange, strong spell of Alma's written words that already in advance were charming and rousing her with their veiled appeal from someone who was neither quite the Alma she had known in girlhood nor the Alma who humorously fitted herself into an adopted summary of human existence.

When the torn flap of the envelope revealed the graceful hurrying script she felt herself set down beyond release within the pattern of the life she had left behind on the far side of eternity. Gay, affectionate greetings sailed, bearing down her protests, across the page. . . .

> "*And, my very dear, tremendous doings. We're invading your London; next week. We'll do a Wagner, you and me and Hypo.*"

Not from the past and representing it, but from the golden future and heightening its glow they came to her as she imagined the

impersonal sitting down together, before a large stage made vast by outpouring music, of the three equally reduced to silence and committed to experience whose quality could not be stated in advance.

ABOVE the shoulder of the parlourmaid announcing her from the doorway, she saw Densley standing at his table reading a letter, preoccupied, making use of spare seconds. And though not a patient, she felt again, as she had always felt on first entering the subdued light of this quiet room, a weakening of her scepticism before his specialised knowledge and an uncomfortable sense of the ceaseless procession of stricken men and women, trustfully, one by one, crossing the space of floor between door and chair to learn the worst or, at the best, to be reminded that death is waiting and their span of years at the longest only a small number.

But as the maid withdrew and she came forward, the room whose door closed softly behind her was just the room that held his intimate lonely life. And he was once more

only his friendship, an everlasting friend standing there in silhouette against the long window-blind yellowed by the sunlight it was keeping out.

At his best, tall and slender, in profile, with head bent so that the whole of its beautiful line, starting from the base of the neck and abruptly disappearing beneath the rounded edge of vigorously sprouting curls to appear again in the curve of the venerable small bald patch, was clearly visible, embellished by the outstanding close-cropped curls breaking into its shape. Newly-cropped, and gleaming in the dim light. Very fresh and neat he looked, furbished up for the spring, very *serré* in the new grey frock-coat whose tails in an instant would perform their dervish-swirl as he swung round and came with outstretched arms to take her by the shoulders and get in the first words and smother her response with his avalanche of laughter.

But he remained motionless, though now she had nearly reached the victims' chair. If he were really absorbed, she had read into the carefully casual wording of his summons an eagerness he did not feel. She recalled him hunched over his table, throwing down his

pen and coming to meet her half way across the room ; talking into the telephone and murmuring a greeting for her the moment it became his turn to listen. This deliberate postponement of his welcome was new. Pretending to be engrossed in his letter, he was reminding her that her life was but one amongst the many he scanned day by day. And whilst this silent statement checked her eagerness to be congratulated and rejoiced over, he was accumulating advantage that would make his pounce the more effective when it came.

But if he were going to refuse to be a flattering mirror for her joy, this visit would turn into a continuation of a conflict of which she had grown weary. This should be the last time. Never again would she waste her golden leisure in fruitless discussion. This progress across the well-known room was the prelude to farewell. Glancing away from him towards its further space, she became aware of a deep peace and her eyes returned to him. Still holding, as if he were alone, his tranquil pose, he was waiting for her to recognise this peace as the reality beneath their differences. . . .

With a pang of guilt she remembered her impulsive, too-affectionate letter from the

Alpenstock promontory. It was on the strength of that letter that he was daring this test. The living peace in the room was like a light that seemed to flow towards them both from the corner that formed a triangle with him where he stood and herself where she stood ; or to flow from each of them and meet exactly in the corner towards which at their different angles they both faced.

But there was nothing surprising in that. Any two souls could meet if only sometimes they would be silent together and wait. She ought to have known that his Celtic soul would be aware of this. But it would be unfair to let him travel too far in imagining an atonement that did not exist. Yet even as these thoughts flashed through her mind she was regretting the passing of the strange experience of sharing with him an instant of eternity and, in order ever so little to recall it, she banished thought and resisted the further movement that would bring her too near to be ignored and saw, with her eyes on his quietude, the perspective of their friendship open, claiming its place amongst the memories laid up in this room of the years of her London life.

Saw him again as the unknown Great Man

serenely produced by Eleanor Dear from her diminishing stock of "influenchoo peopoo" . . . summoned and coming, a tall handsome saviour in dress-clothes, to her sickroom at midnight, tired and harassed, gently talking and questioning and writing ; ignoring the friend in the corner until suddenly he insulted her and her beloved London night-streets by asking, without troubling to look at her, whether she were equal to going out and ringing up a chemist. And her first visit, as Eleanor's agent, to sound him before she cast her desperate net over Taunton. And, as a single occasion, all the sittings, in this room, over Eleanor's difficulties and the business of rescuing Taunton . . . secretly, under the shadow of Harley Street, under the threat of death, not lifting until Eleanor was provided for away from the brightness of lives still unthreatened.

And all their meetings and conflicts all over London, since the day she had lectured him, with Veresaief's *Confessions of a Doctor* as text, on the inevitable ignorance of the high-priests of Medicine ; and all his kindly human sympathy with her Socialists and Anarchists and Suffragists . . . and his belief that their hold on her was only a makeshift. . . .

"Glad to be back, dear-girl?" he murmured thoughtfully.

"I'm not back yet; still much more there than here," she said, smiting at his preparedness to sit down and state her experience in what he believed to be its right proportions, drawing her out with questions and greeting her answers with head thrown back and mouth wide for his indrawn laughter – its final gasp bringing him forward to smite her knee and make his comments and wait, eyes still filled with laughter, for her to share his mirth at her expense. Not one word of enthusiasm should he have, nor anything that might give him food for amusement.

Still remaining ambushed behind his letter, he flung out, as she advanced, an arm that found and gently shoved her into the confessional chair whence nothing was visible but the tall screen hiding the place of anxious disrobings, his littered table and himself, in profile against the high oblong of screened sunlight . . . swinging round with a single swift movement to face her, seated; long grey-trousered legs elegantly crossed, crease going to the Devil . . . spats . . . a *pink* moss-rosebud, a grave, tired face surveying

her as though she were a patient, a new patient.

He was quite innocent, tired and London-worn, emerging with grave simplicity from pre-occupations that made havoc of his grandeur, accentuated the dreadful rosebud more completely than would the debonair manner that perhaps he had worn an hour ago.

" Whose wedding have you been to ? " she asked cruelly, through her pity that condemned as monstrous the demand that he should turn aside from his exacting affairs to pay tribute to her festivity.

Mentally she added silk hat and light gloves and set him amongst guests thronging to the reception, saw him play his part, a lightly, musically-moving figure of benevolence ; radiating, as she had seen him at Socialist gatherings they had visited together, the kindly humanity the Lycurgans possessed only as a dogma with which to bludgeon their opponents.

True democracy, the ruling of everybody by their best selves, was more readily to be found amongst the Oberlanders than amongst professed Socialists. And here, to her hand, was a topic that would represent her experiences, give him the key to them in a way that would

rob him, if by chance this present gravity were assumed, of what he was secretly chuckling over in advance, and startle him by putting his own case better than he had done in their many battles, and also, by making it one with hers, demonstrate the truth in both and his own one-sidedness.

" I've been to no wedding, my-dear."

This was the low, pitying tone he used when she failed to be moved by some specially " moving " human drama selected from his day's experiences.

He looked away, towards the writing-table, took up a paper-knife and thoughtfully tapped the table's polished edge.

" Then why so glorious ? "

She smiled to cover her failure to approve, but with averted eyes, so that she might no longer see the pink rosebud soften his good looks with its dreadful prettiness. Perhaps it didn't. Perhaps the intolerable effect was produced by apathy, by the weariness he was not trying to conceal ; spring weariness after his too-arduous winter.

Their voices sounded together and she threw away the beginning of her hopeful topic to attend to his meditative voice – the Celtic

shape of its tone, the first two words on one middle note, then one two notes higher with a curve in its course that brought it two notes lower than the opening words, then ding-dong up and down, the last drop curving up at its end as if to redeem statement by giving it the form of courteous question ; but to-day the persuasiveness, that always made his words seem spoken from the sure ground of belief, was not there, the end of his sentence fell sadly amongst the bright echoes their many meetings had left in this corner of the room. She heard the slithering discouraged soft fall of the paper-knife upon the table and looked up and found him sitting, with lightly clasped hands, forward in his chair regarding her : calm brow, steady searching eyes, the look of weariness vanished, the rosebud serenely saying that physicians have their lighter moments.

" Ye had a brave time, dear-girl ? "

He spoke with grave warmth, inviting confidence. Watching his eyes while she banished from her mind all she had brought with her into the room, she could not find the shadow of a smile ; but, even while she refused to afford him material, there he sat, entrenched, solidly representing dispersive generalisations. And

to-day he was not waiting for her to withhold or give him his chance to pounce. Turning away his eyes he went on : " I saw Campbell this morning ; he told me ye were back and that he'd never seen ye look so well."

Professional interest ; but she was not going to be drawn into discussing her health that was restored for evermore since she had seen the light on the mountains.

" Of course," she said judicially, conveniently recalling an overheard phrase : " the Swiss winter is marvellous. You go out unable to grasp the meaning of a newspaper column " – she felt her stored wealth shift away, as if assailed, as if threatening to depart – " and after twenty-four hours you can read a stiff treatise and remember each point."

" Did ye read stiff treatises ? "

" No ; but I could remember anything I wanted to, and see *into* things." She threw her raised voice after him as he got up and moved away – feeling herself forgiven, having testified, attempted to testify an incommunicable experience – to the blinded window through whose open upper half now came the sound of a car drawing up at the door : interruption punctually at hand, just as she was

back again in that moment on the promontory that had filled everything with light, just as she could, she felt, have answered, even though irrelevantly, all the questions on earth.

With a click the blind had shot up, letting in the yellow London sunlight, and in its dense blaze she stood up to depart, for now the thudding of the car filled the room, voices shouting it down sounded from the pavement and the steps, and the door-bell buzzed through the hall.

"You are fortunate," she sang out into the blinding light, into the indifferent ears preoccupied already with the communications of the arriving patient, "to have a corner house!" and saw the several corridors of gold that broke across the long grey street and felt herself already escaped into its echoey stillness, going, as she had come, unspent, to meet the green mists of the park and find its new crocuses; find the close ranks of mauve and white hiding the grass of that little alley again, stand and look and again feel that cool English freshness as if touching her all over, as if she were unclothed.

"Campbell was right," he said gently into the stillness restored by the stopping of the

engine ; "it's made ye like a red, red rose."

Her happy blush revealed to her the shape of her body – as if for her own contemplation, as if her attention were being called to an unknown possession that yet was neither hers nor quite herself – glowing with a radiance that was different from the radiance of the surrounding sunlight ; and turning to bend and gather up the gloves on which she had been sitting she seemed to journey far away from him and from herself into the depths of her being and mingle there with an unknown creature rising to meet and take her nature and transform it to the semblance of his ideal. And in this semblance, a stranger to herself and nameless, she came upright with the retrieved gloves in her hand and turned to face him in the room's sunlight that now seemed the light of open spaces.

"Your patient," she had said before she was aware, towards him still standing leisurely in his window-space . . . approaching, saying, swiftly he passed her : "He's early ; he can wait. Sit down again" – and disappearing into the background whence he asked, as the everyday door of his bookcase came open with

an insouciant squeak, whether she had ever been to Italy.

"No," she said and paused, remembering Guerini and his revelation of an Italy that was not the Italy of her dreams. And his dogmas, and his amazement in hearing them questioned, and his anger, dull brown like his clothes, and hers that had cured her, and his sorrow and belated willingness to look at alternative interpretations, and his obliteration by Eaden in whom the same dogmas, being held thoughtlessly, had seemed so much more monstrous and implacable. And seemed at this moment not to matter so very much. Neither Guerini's nor Eaden's nor Densley's nor any man's to matter perhaps at all, except to themselves. Thought of altogether, reverberating over the world in all its languages, they seemed just an unpleasant noise ; like the chattering of those born deaf. Yet she felt that even now, hearing them, it would be impossible to content herself, as she had observed so many women do, with a wise smile. Even now.

But this was flying off, running off with what might be an illusion. She wished the window-blind back in place that she might see more clearly, see his face when he left his books and

returned ; discover whether his general strangeness to-day meant that on the strength of her absurd letter he was again minded to risk, was not expecting, a rebuff, and was yet, because he once had had one, proudly nervous and uncertain – and meanwhile she must remain here, balanced between return to her customary life and the way of being she had entered a moment ago and that could be, she now realised with sober astonishment, her chosen way till death – or whether he were simply engrossed in some sad case whose story she would presently hear told in his way of telling : pausing at every turn for signs of sympathy, and yet ready to laugh over her harsh comments. And again she was reminded of Eleanor. And this time the thought of her brought within the sun's streaming light a darkness that centred in herself who a moment ago had felt transparent to endless light. A forgotten, deliberately forgotten darkness disqualifying her to be anything to anybody. . . .

" What has become of Eleanor Dear ? "

" When did ye last heere of her, lassie ? " The sparing, softly-treading tone of his stories of his most dreadful cases : gentle judgment, without reproach.

" Oh, I don't know – ages ago " – her voice was hard, frostily selfish, something for a man to fly from – " when that heroic little Jew took her to Egypt."

" Then ye've not heard of her death ? "

It was not shock or sadness that kept her silent. Immense, horrible relief in being certain that now the burden of Eleanor would never again return upon her hands. And great wonder, that Eleanor had done her dying. Somewhere, in some unknown room, she had accomplished that tremendous deed. Alone.

" Rodkin took her to Egypt " – he was bringing the comfort of his voice across the room – " first consulting me " – but remained out of sight behind her chair with a book, slowly turning its leaves that went over with a crumpling sound, large, glazed clay-paper leaves ; heavy – " and kept her there for something over eighteen months. She got no better. When they returned, she was beyond human aid. His resources were exhausted. We got her into St. Aloysius's. The sisters were kind and grew fond of her. My mother visited her daily and was with her when she passed away. I think she was happy at the end."

Eleanor, forced to cease fighting and accept, lying there hollow-eyed and emaciated, growing weaker and weaker, but still charming; free, while she waited for those halls of Zion all jubilant with song, to charm these new friends. . . .

"The little atheist Russian Jew was a better Christian than the English curate."

"He married her; in Egypt. The bairns have father and name."

"Lancelot and Lobelia . . . *Rodkin*." Her voice trembled with laughter. In which he joined, and Eleanor, driving away her fierce authoritative little frown, and with rose-blush and arch affectionate smile, seemed, from heaven, to be joining too. She would. She would accept anything but reproach. Ease had come, though the picture of herself indignantly preaching at Eleanor for wasting Rodkin's substance remained an immovable torment and disgrace. He had laughed his lightly gasping extremity of laughter and yet did not come round to face and share her mirth. But she felt absolved. He knew, better perhaps than anyone, he had seen again and again, the worst that was in her – intolerance, hatred, malice . . . no, not malice,

something worse, uncharitableness, the things he most deplored – without condemnation. He knew perfectly, from first to last, all of Eleanor's manœuvrings ; without condemning them. Small wonder he was the beloved physician. . . .

Her sense of her own being, with its good and bad carelessly unmasked, more at ease in this room than in any other but her own, was expanding beyond this corner she knew so well, taking possession of the unvisited parts of the room brought near by his perambulating voice ; feeling its way into the wider spaces within the air that filled its visible limits. But imperfectly, hindered by the direct glare of the sun and the presence of the patient waiting in the next room.

" I asked ye about Italy, because I rather think of going there." This time his voice, coming from the farthest end of the room, as if he were in that deep recess and looking out of its tall, narrow window, was like the voice of someone giving a cheery morning greeting to someone else suddenly and gladly seen from the midst of busy preoccupation : confident of response, not needing to wait and take note of it. It came nearer than if he were sitting at her side.

"People were going down," she said, and the distance they had to travel made her words songful – they were meeting across the length of the sad room ; he and she, from the far distances of their separate beings, obliterating, with the sounds of their common to-day, the melancholy echoes left within it – "from Oberland. They go, in one day, from the Swiss winter into the Italian spring."

"I'll go," he chanted back through the clatter of a dray turning into a neighbouring mews, "if I go, from Paris, where I'll be attending the Medical Congress the first week in May."

The dray thundered swiftly over the cobblestones, spreading a clamour that consumed every other sound.

"Don't ye think," said his gentlest voice just above her head, "I'll have earned a holiday ?" His arms, linked by the large book, came over and round her, and the book came down opened upon her knees : a double-page picture of Venice, Grand Canal edged by stately buildings, gondolieri gracefully driving swift gondolas along the flat water ; moonlight and song. He was crouching at her side, his face out of sight, just level with her own,

one arm along the back of the low chair, the other tilting the book inwards from the blinding light.

" Isn't that where people go for their honeymoon ? " he murmured thoughtfully, as if considering the picture.

She felt him watching while she waited, gazing through the outspread scene, for words more in harmony than was this arch jocularity with the steady return of the strange new light within her that now streamed forth to join the blinding sunlight, so that she was isolated in a mist of light, far away from him and waiting for the sound of her name.

" Ye still scorn honeymoons."

He was gone. The light flowed back into herself as she turned and saw him standing tall and upright, elbow on mantelpiece, several feet away, saw his face, sad above the pink rosebud and as nearly stern as in its changeless kindliness it could ever be.

What had he seen while he watched ? Her perfect stillness while she contemplated a proposition ? And perhaps he was right. The strange vision of the future expanding endlessly in light had held as she gazed into it no personal thought of him and prompted no response.

Gently she approached him, trying in the way she again pleaded for his wretched patient to convey the change produced in her regard by this discovery of him as a source of marvels. But he held her off with casual talk. He now believed, and she grew scarlet and took hasty leave as the thought came, that he had completely surprised her, and that this belated response was a clutching at an opportunity whose quality had been realised while she sat silent. And perhaps he was right in that too. Perhaps the strange glory to which she had responded was born of a selfish rejoicing. Perhaps, watching her, he had read the signs of a secret, selfish triumph. Missed some essential, unmistakable sign.

Yet gravely and with a meditative enviousness he had said more than once that a husband opens for his wife the gate of a temple into which he may not follow her. And still in that moment of being wrapped in light that could have come only through the opened gate, he had expected her to respond in kind to his sly jocularity? Had closed the gate and left her outcast because she was kept silent and entranced, forgetting his personal presence,

seeing only the newness of life into which she was about to step.

Walking on down the street, she turned again towards that strange moment, trying to recall the experience. But it was the visible pageant of marriage that rose before her eyes ; so suitably, she felt now, a floral pageant. Wistfully, with new knowledge and interest, she watched the form of the satin-clad bride adream in a vast loneliness of time that was moving with the swiftness of the retreating movement of the years that were leaving her for ever, amidst a bevy of wide-awake, hopeful bridesmaids, vanish into the dark porch of the church whose clamour of bell-notes, falling in cascades into the sunlit air, brightened the light upon the grey buildings ; saw the led bride, a lonely representative of humanity, measuring off the last moments of her singleness, reluctantly until the equally lonely representative came in sight, waiting for her at the altar, and the footsteps of her spirit hurried to be with him.

She heard the two voices sound out from time into eternity, amidst a stillness of flowers ; and the triumphant crashing of the Mendelssohn March as the two figures came forth from the

vestry door and came down the aisle towards the light falling upon them from the high west window.

It was because life with Densley would hold the light of an in-pouring eternity that she had found herself willing to throw in her lot with his. In Hypo there was no sense of eternity; nor in Michael, except for the race, an endless series of people made in God's image, all dead or dying.

Yet she was approving the rescue of Densley. Vibrating within her, side by side with resentment, was relief. And as she surveyed the little back street, where now she found herself, in search of food to be consumed in the ten minutes left of her lunch-hour, she felt, with a comfortingly small pang of wistfulness, the decisive hour that had just gone by slide into its place in the past and leave her happily glancing along the shop-fronts of this mean little back street.

Teetgen's Teas, she noted, in grimed, gilt lettering above a dark and dingy little shop. . . .

Teetgen's Teas. And behind, two turnings back, was a main thoroughfare. And just ahead was another. And the streets of this particular district arranged themselves in her

mind, each stating its name, making a neat map.

And *this* street, still foul and dust-filled, but full now also of the light flooding down upon and the air flowing through the larger streets with which in her mind it was clearly linked, was the place where in the early years she would suddenly find herself lost and helplessly aware of what was waiting for her eyes the moment before it appeared : the grimed gilt lettering that *forced me to gaze into the darkest moment of my life and to remember that I had forfeited my share in humanity for ever and must go quietly and alone until the end.*

And now their power has gone. They can bring back only the memory of a darkness and horror, to which, then, something has happened, begun to happen ?

She glanced back over her shoulder at the letters now away behind her and rejoiced in freedom that allowed her to note their peculiarities of size and shape.

From round the next corner came a distant, high, protesting, nasal yell dropping into a long shuddering gurgle : *Punch.* She turned the corner. There they were at the end of the street.

In front of a greengrocer's a few slum children standing in the muddy street, more numerous elders, amongst them a busy doctor, paused for a moment, a teacher, excusing her delight with a sceptical smile, two rapt hospital nurses.

Munching one of the greengrocer's foreign apples, tasting like pineapple, she held up her face towards the mimic theatre high in air, from which joy flowed down upon this little crowd eagerly and voluntarily gathered together.

OBERLAND again ; its golden light, and its way of making its outer world conform to its inner. Something of heaven, precarious, but temporarily closing the doors of hell. Shedding its light upon the young man swiftly crossing the lounge alone, a little shifty, burdened with some threat, uneasy in hurrying alone from point to point in the world-wide enclosure.

" Here she is ! " Alma's voice, and Alma appearing from along a corridor of greenery, in a filmy West-End gown. Arrived, with

power and freedom to move and choose and be at ease in the manner of a native, in the world whose outermost fringes she had touched in girlhood. (Coming up, on great occasions, in a hired omnibus, with a party of excited people, all being excessively sociable and slaying, without knowing it, the very occasion as it passed—to the *Gaiety*.)

And now both of them, two little figures side by side, two little Oberlanders, conforming, dressed in defiance of Lycurgan tweeds and *djibbêhs*.

Their voices, amongst those of the birthright members of the world-wide Oberland sounding from all over the quietly-lit restaurant, were alien. In pitch and intonation. But their minds gave the corner where they sat the character of a small preserve : of originality within the wide spread of innocent conventionality. Yet they were both under the spell of the innocent conventionality ; a little eager in their conformity, rather too consciously at home and at ease.

Giving her time, being so far too busy with correct by-play to notice her silence, to delight in their surprising tribute to Oberland. She had expected them to stand out from this world, unmoved by it and revealing their

differently directed vitality. They were quenched. By their own correct clothes and the further garment of their surroundings.

Toned up, in the midst of the fatigue left by the day, by the interest of meeting them for the first time in the open, she glanced at Hypo sitting at her side in uniform, cut off from his moorings and launched in the sea of London life, and observed how his dress-clothes, while accentuating his commonplace type, deepened the quality of the blue-grey eyes that was himself visible. Grey of high-power intelligence turned outwards, twinkling blue of sanguine nature at home in delights hampering the austere grey.

There was no seaward window through which his gaze could escape across the world, and the clear light replacing the upper twilight created by the Bonnycliff lamp-shades showed the blue and the grey beams together in full power, dammed up and, so carefully was he not looking about, short-circuiting ; embarrassing his mind as the rather small sofa upon which the three of them sat side by side was embarrassing his movements. Embarrassment from which, in Oberland, she, as his feminine guest, should be helping him to escape.

And again, as in early days at the Alpenstock, while bathing in the light created by the men and women about her, she was in conflict with the convention that kept urbane women alert at the front gates of consciousness to guard the ease of men waiting to be set going on their topics.

Reminded by the suave voices sounding from the level near at hand and, in distant parts of the room, from the upper air into which they rose – assailing her with memories of their rivals, the sounds echoing in the open amongst the Oberland mountains – of the instantaneous flow of words in just this pitch of voice and shape of tone the moment two or more Alpenstockers were gathered together, she cried within herself that it was indecent and could have sat back and laughed aloud over the tide of masquerading sound, only that the ugly poor word worried her with its negative, insufficient expression of the destructive power of incessant speech.

"Outrageous," she murmured.

"Right." Hypo's voice at her side, clear and mirthful within its huskiness like the blue within the misty grey. "Caviare's outrageous. No caviare."

The waiter was there, the evening begun, its events counting themselves off ; only this small half-hour available for being together, with the tension of expectation making its moments shallow.

As if he feared the man might run away, as if to register his awareness, and disapproval, of the way waiters are apt to make off before their "*beneficent* and *necessary*," but "*tiresome*," business is properly concluded, and to give warning that on this occasion patience was needed but would be rewarded by entertainment, Hypo kept a hand upheld in the direction of the waiter and crooked towards him a detaining, instructive finger while slowly he deciphered, French syllable by syllable, in the manner of a child learning to read – each syllable equally accented, but offered as if in itself it were someone's most precious unconscious jest – the items of their feast ; half raising his head, after each quotation, in the direction of the waiter for confirmation and permission to bend once more, first drawing breath for the renewed effort, over his "*arduous*," but "*diverting*," task. When this small exhibition was over he would drop into talk, but only after a swift collecting glance, achieved in the course

of turning in speech towards Alma or herself, at the immediately surrounding and possibly appreciatively witnessing neighbours.

Outrageous, she resumed within, while there was yet time, but found in her mind only a vision of Alma gracefully set towards the little drama, the smile produced for it left forgotten on her face while away within her hidden world she mused alone.

The dismissed waiter passed by, gliding headlong, pushed open a near door that let in a wave of heat, the glare of unscreened light, the sounds of foreign voices shouting orders against the kitchen-clatter, in high-pitched nasal monotone : the world beneath this festive scene, supporting it.

Unconscious Oberlanders, complacently accepting. And all over the world a growing strength, with revengeful eyes set only upon the defects of the qualities that had built the high-walled Lhassa now preserving a perilous mental oblivion.

She listened to their sounds. Subdued buzzing, barking and fluting of English voices ; laughter : women's laughter springing delicately, consciously beautiful, from note to note upwards or downwards in the scale,

spontaneous croakings of elderly women, graduates in life ; men's laughter whuffing out on single notes that seemed to resound from distant places where life is risked and won.

" All these manicured voices," she said quietly, leaning outwards to catch also Alma's ear, and collided with Hypo's voice and saw him drop his remark half-finished and swiftly turn a hopeful, investigating eye. Alma's laugh tinkled, abruptly accentuated ; mirthless. An extinguisher. And whilst Hypo, accepting it, passed it on warmed and disarmed by a flattering, appreciative grin, Miriam saw, deep-drawn for her benefit on Alma's brow – as she turned to select her *hors d'œuvre*, repeating the sound in order to assert her stewardship of the conversation and keep silent during the instant required for improvising a fresh departure, the initiator of so unsuitable a topic – a pucker of disgust.

" Ears," said Hypo in his low-comedian manner, eyebrows up in hopeless reflectiveness, hands thrown out in a small gesture of mock-despair, " voices and *ears*."

" I know. Don't be afraid."

Sitting back to talk for him alone, she said, as the little dishes came her way and she was

obliged to come again into the open, in tones modulated to exclude Alma from all but the sound of their cool engrossment : " There's something a fortnight old you must hear at once, before it loses its first charm," and helped herself at random and sat back, unwilling to feast and forget or endanger the bright landscape of thought that here on neutral territory she could so much more easily induce him to contemplate than if she were facing him, entrenched and defensive, upon his accustomed background.

" You shall tell me," he said in the restrained, self-amused manner that would show at short range as the prelude to a witticism, " anything you like," glowing voice for herself, glance at the waiter to share and steer his awareness in the way it should go : nice gentleman humouring wilful young lady ; " if," finger up to announce arrival of epigram, " you'll take an anchovy and an olive." He was unattained, perhaps unattainable, intent only on keeping the balance between his sense of the occasion as public and at the same time a meeting of lovers.

" You'll have to *listen*." Alma's lovely eye, as gracefully she bent to the morsel on her

fork, came round surveying. "Anchovy," said Hypo firmly; "we're here to consume, each other's minds if we've time before they're dissolved in Wagner, but also olives and things."

"I want you to repeat something for me." She turned to her food as the patient waiter passed on and Alma's eye, coming round once more, reassured, took another direction; a happy sense of security closed about her, the certainty that neither his adroitness nor Alma's permanent readiness to create diversions would prevent the launching of her discovery upon its beneficent career.

"Say, being careful to speak slowly, 'Too many irons in the fire.'"

"Is this a parlour-game? You *are* a dear, Miriam."

"It's the time and the place and the topic, all together. Speak."

"There's nothing in reason I wouldn't do for you, Miretta, even to saying too many irons in the fire."

"Too fast. I wanted to beat time to the convulsions."

"As a prelude to *Wagner* . . ." he began, speaking slowly while he felt for a witticism she intended not to hear.

The people at the near table, centring on the man with pebble-eyes, grey-agate, full of unconscious spiritual awareness, and an innocent wide brow – just left off telling a tale in his cheerful-apologetic voice that could press on through anything and leave no one hurt, though some self-judged and perhaps to see him again in memory as he was at this moment, at future moments of being brought face to face with themselves – were now all babbling at once, like those who having heard music must shield themselves from its influence or hide their inability to enter it, by discussion.

" Everyone," she said, free to speak at ease, " excepting most of the people here and their like, suffer, when they say those words, seven separate, face-distorting convulsions."

He was attending. Alma, deafened by the clamour to the right and aware only of her quietly comversational bearing and, glancing at Hypo, of his attention absented inwards in contemplation of something just offered to his thought, let her eyes rest on Miriam's and sent forth, through the dreamy mildness shining from them because her lips were curved in a smile, the deep magnetic radiance Miriam had found in one of her photographs, a radiation

of her inner being he must have known while still they were lovers and it was turned only upon himself who had called it forth, and now saw only when by chance he witnessed the turning of it upon others, in payment for help given in the labours exacted by her perpetual stewardship of his well-being.

Receiving this radiance fully for the first time, Miriam felt she could kneel, with the world's manhood, in homage to the spirit of the womanly woman, yet shared as the radiance passed, their cramped uneasiness, the fear that makes them flee, once they are committed to the companionship of these women, from the threat of being surrounded and engulfed in insufficiency.

She leaned forward seeking for something to sing out by way of greeting, but Alma met and held her up and sent her back with the intense, crinkled, quizzical little smile that was her rallying-call for attention to immediate things. Her sudden immortal beauty had vanished and in its place was one of the many facets of that part of her being that was turned towards outside things : the bright brisk active little person, selfless and strong in endurance behind her fragile austere daintiness, willing to help

everyone on his way. Approved by both, Miriam sat back, licensed to be happy ; and within the enclosed air there came a freshness from the wide spaces through which together they were travelling as they sat.

" Tooo, *men-ny*, *eye-erns*, *in*, the *fy-er*. Incessant chinwagging. Jaws moving round like grindstones. Toom-ny ahns in'th'fah. Just two small snaps."

" Labour-saving. I see your point. But it costs beauty."

" English vowels are ugly to begin with. ' I ' deserves all its sufferings. The people I am talking about whose speech – at least the men's speech – has been shaped at public school and college, turn it into a German ' o ' modified. And they do the same with the equally ugly English ' a.' ' All that has made England great ' becomes with them ' öl thöt hös möd England gröht.' And they do so not because they recognise that the sound of the vowels is ugly, but for a *much* more fascinating reason. And the genteel *middle* classes turn the ugly ' i ' into ' e ' or ' a ' : ' refined ' becomes ' refaned ' or ' refeened.' Also for a fascinating reason which is not the same as the reason of those socially above them. And they, too,

jib at 'a.' 'Diana, where is your black hat?' becomes 'Di-enna, where is your bleck het?'

"Below these, and for still another fascinating reason, you get 'a' turned into 'oy' or 'ah,' 'refoined' or 'refahnd.' The only people who preserve the native hideousness of the English 'i' and 'a' are the cultured middle classes, academics, and all those who don't care what happens to their faces while they speak so long as their speech is what they imagine to be correct. Respect for beauty is not the cause either of correct English speech or its various manglings, nor of the way English words are accented, nor of the way the English *walk*. Look at the swing of a Highland regiment. Swirling pipes and swaying kilts, and swinging tread that keeps the body always balanced in movement and never with dead flat foot upon the ground. English march music *pounds* its beats like someone hitting out, and if you put Englishmen into kilts the kilts would not swing to the march."

"Get back to your theme, Miriam. If labour-saving isn't the point, what *is*?"

"There are, of course, people with no ear, or with badly developed speech-organs, speaking horribly, in all classes; but they are not the

originators of any of the jargons. And the jargon we are specially considering, the one that is most hated, by those not born to it, because it is upper class and seems supercilious as well as affected, is honest and innocent."

"Origin, origin."

"Innocent and most desperately interesting. The other jargons, the middle and lower class, are innocent too, but less interesting. The middle-class jargon is *mincing* : originates in a genteel aspiration, a desire to keep the mouth closed. Hence *refaned*, and *nace*, and *nane*. Or, in people with very long noses, *refeened*, and *neece*, and *neene*. The lower class variations, like the provincial, originate in a hearty revelling in sound, especially in open-mouthed vowels. And when people discuss the possibility of English becoming a world-speech, I always wonder which English they have in mind. Speech is the Englishman's only gesture. Hence its heavy accentuation. All the jargons have that. An undergraduate accents his speech exactly as he accents his walk, in jerks."

"Point, Miriam. What is the origin of the speech you, a professed Socialist, are now found treacherously adoring ?"

" I'm not taking *sides* any more. You can't have a middle without edges, right and left. Or edges without a middle."

" Nonsense. I'm interested in your thread, and have a sneaking sympathy with the way you festoon and tie it in knots. But if you have a point to make, make it. In the straight and and narrow way."

" Narrow ; exactly. That's for action. In speech the straight and narrow way is always either a *lie* or an *exhibition*. That is the curse of speech : its inability to express several things simultaneously. All the unexpressed things come round and grin at everything that is said. One day I shall become a Trappist."

" Wait ; a few years. Meanwhile make your point."

" The point is a technique, born of a spiritual condition. A state of mind, if you prefer. But the condition and the technique are so closely akin that you can actually make discoveries about the state of mind by experimentally adopting the technique. It is, up to a point, of course only up to a point, true, that if you speak in a certain way you will feel correspondingly. Anyhow you can know that the technique was honestly born. And is so born again

and again, although it now appears to go ahead in its own right as the manner of a single class, and those who grow up in it, or acquire it at school or college, use it quite naturally."

"Spiritual condition, state of mind. *Point*, Miriam."

"Concentration. Imagine yourself in a position of responsibility, a prefect in a public school . . ."

"Heaven forbid."

"A prefect, obliged to canalise all your forces and have all your wits about you, in order to remain the composed and authoritative representative of a code. You won't spend your strength on elocution, unless you are an æsthete, which is unlikely, since, if you were, you would not also be a prefect. Being a prefect, you will instinctively avoid all sounds that tend to discompose your authoritative and dignified mug. Hence *Ieee left myeee bag at the staytion* becomes *öh löft m'bög at th'stöshn*, and all the rest of it. Ineffable, of course, in a sixth-form boy. But it begins there, and then goes through the services, all over the dominions and colonies, and for a reason probably quite easy to find, is rampant in the Indian Civil. Surroundings perhaps. And in the diplomatic,

where graciousness and bonhomie are as important as dignified composure, and authority is not specially called for, I will wager that there is less jargon and more face-convulsion. Humbug, in fact : facial animation, to disarm. People who speak *beautifully*, like those who have beautiful handwriting, are *usually* either humbugs or charlatans. Not that a touch of these is necessarily bad. Or they are Scotch or Irish. Shaw speaks beautifully. But he's never been an English prefect or commanded a battleship, or stood on the terrace of an ancestral home gazing out across an empire. So he can afford to let himself go on musical sounds. And be witty in and out of season. That's all, I think. Just that the apparently deliberate *jargon* of these Romans is, in its origin, both innocent and inevitable. But there is one frightful exception : the way some, only some, of them elaborate one of the a's. When they say, for example, 'South-Ayahfrica,' and call a man a 'mayan,' they are quite deliberately *drawling*. But perhaps, all things considered, it is pardonable, only, being so noticeable, it is the one fragment of their technique that is usually imitated by outsiders and, in them, can be simply intolerable. For all the rest it is

surely better to force speech to pass through your composure and take its chance of damage, rather than to be obediently correct and let it throw you into convulsions. At any rate for men, who can so rarely speak quite spontaneously and beautifully. Flowingly, un-self-consciously, without any definite tone-shape or technique, ugly and beautiful, of accentuation. That seems to be for women. But that is another whole big question. I only wish to show how unjustly the convention of these Romans is condemned."

"You've done it, I think, Miretta, quite triumphantly. But don't waste yourself, your curious perceptiveness and your sensitively discriminating ear, on these clan dialects. Learn languages."

"But isn't it worth while to realise that these people are darlings and not *poseurs*? . . . *What's this?*" The savoury-smelling dish had appeared at her elbow slyly, as if it were a trap prepared to take her by surprise while her attention was far away. She stared at the raised roof of sheeny golden-brown crust, fascinated, wondering at her strange sudden apprehensiveness.

"Lark pie, madame."

Brought back by the sound of her soft, sharp cry from the instant's loss of herself in horrified vision, she found the party broken up ; herself set apart struggling with the remains of the emotion that had innocently rebuked their insensibility. Sideways, while she sat controlling her risen tears, she saw Hypo motion the waiter away with what was perhaps the main item of his ordering – she tried in vain to recall what had been served – and keep going, with the manner and gestures of conversational engrossment, the appearance of unbroken continuity ; ready to include her as soon as she should have recovered. But for her there was no rescue. She was alone, with them and her Romans to whom they conformed without approval, and the innocent pie that had so horribly reminded her she was off the line of her march.

The *What am I doing here?* that had sounded from time to time during their past association came back on this evening created by that past and yet fitting so perfectly into the present that had seemed to exclude them, and indeed was admitting them only as participators, more favourably circumstanced than herself, in the Oberland life.

But though it sounded insistently, it held

now a promise, as if of an appointment made towards which, though all her ways seemed blocked, she was invisibly moving. Always had been moving, driven on in the end, whenever she had for a moment thought herself arrived at her destination, by its warning cry. It had sounded everywhere, almost daily, at Banbury Park, at Wimpole Street, at Flaxman's, in the houses of all her friends ; everywhere. Except for a while amidst the loveliness of Newlands, and earlier of Germany, where in the midst of suffering there had been that deep depth of happiness for whose sake she would have gone on enduring for ever.

" Foreign countries," she said, and felt them both turn a little eagerly, and felt this moment in the restaurant become one with their past together. They were held waiting, attentive to her engrossment in the reality she wanted them to share : the way one's own deep sense of being, so vibrant and so still, is never stronger or more curiously alarming than when it is confirmed by being found existing in foreign, unknown ways of being. The same way set in a different form. A form that in Germany had its voice in music that drew even Fräulein into the magic circle and disarmed

her. But they would not share it. There was no way of proving the importance of the individual deep sense of being that for them meant little or nothing. And no means of making them stop their keyed-up mental processes. Shaped by *fashion* . . . well, by *making*, by *men*.

" Of course," she said, breaking her train of thought and coming into the surface moment, but still so full of widely dispersed feeling that she had no idea what she might be going to say. " Of course there is actually no such thing as travel. So they say. There is nothing but a *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*, meaning *de tout ce que je suis*, even in a *tour du monde*."

" We are going to travel, Miriam, *everywhere*. This small planet is a misfit. . . ."

He glanced at her and checked himself, ironically, smiling round over the table where now sweets and coffee and dessert, assembled together, announced the hurried end. He was reminding himself that didactic speculations were the wrong note.

" There's more space within than without," she said. And he had heard, the first clear statement she had found to assert her world against his own, and refrained and winked at

her affectionately from the midst of beginning to be amusing over the hasty winding up of their feast, and presently glanced swiftly again, for his own purpose, genuinely incredulous over her persistent earnestness.

In the dark interior of the cab, part of London's Oberland, linking its sacred spaces, Hypo and Alma became once more fellow-adventurers, reduced to simplicity by the prospect of being submissive items in the community of a London audience. She warmed towards them both, glad of their ignorance of the great moment last week when she had included them in a past that was finished, glad of that common past from which they had reappeared in the guise of fellow-members, more practised than herself but still aspirant, of the world-wide house-party.

Embodying the whole history of her London life, they gave a measure to the occasion that was now falling happily into its place as the first event of the new life begun amongst the sunlit mountains.

For though the being with them emphasised her imprisoning circumstances, it was also strengthening her inward certainty by revealing that the fact-facing and circumstance-facing

mood they induced had no longer any power at all over the light shining from the future over her earliest memories : revived in Oberland and now leaping forward regardless of the intervening years.

In the midst of Hypo's talk, she smiled towards the visible radiance that was drawing her forward and felt that within some as yet unknown life her being had set in that moment a small deep root.

A passing light flashed on her face and then on his opposite : far away, the face of a stranger caught approvingly regarding her through the eyes of an old friend. Audibly, through her smile, she sighed her joy in the compact just made with the in-flowing future that already was driving this short evening into the past.

" Miriam in her London is somehow different," he said, feeling for a compliment. " She's . . . pervasively at *home*. You are a Londoner, you know, Miriam, in your *bones*."

" *Neapolitan* ices," she said hurriedly, to shake off the discomfort of contemplating his preoccupation with surface environment, " but it's Covent Garden we're going to. How can I get to Covent Garden when I'm sitting, *avec mes parents*, aged eight, in the front row

of the Lyceum dress-circle waiting for the statue of Hermione to come to life and about to be moved, very deeply, by the sight of a striped Neapolitan ice?"

"Bless'er," said Alma, converting the dismal interior of the growler into another of the many rooms in which together they had sat and talked.

They were being taken an immense distance along the main gallery, a hopeless distance, nearer and nearer to stage and music. A *box*. Of course.

Who first took the very worst part of the house for seeing and hearing and, by making it the costliest, made it also the most exclusive? The convention arose when theatres were ill-lit and only those near the stage could see the spectacle? And continued now that it was worse than useless? And he was docile to it. "A box at the opera," suitable only for those who regarded opera as a social occasion, an after-dinner entertainment of which they were a prominent part, splendid, correct, bored, within the sanctuaries they had hired for the season because it was part of the season's routine.

The first glimpse of the house and curtained

stage seemed to prove to her that boxes are not in the theatre at all, but "in Society."

And when Alma had been persuaded into the corner commanding the least unfavourable view and she was ensconced in the relative darkness of the opposite corner, her spirit sought in vain for the familiar full power of the play-house, the power that exerted itself independently of what might be presented on the stage. It could be felt in perfection only by those seated centrally, in stalls, not too near ; in dress-circle, not too far back ; in pit, almost anywhere in the pit ; and in gallery so long as the stage was just visible.

Hypo came forward from hanging up his coat in the hinder darkness and took his seat between them and the light fell upon the three of them perched side by side upon the face of a cliff, facing the world, facing other cliff-dwellers whose world they had reached. She felt excitedly composed, ensconced and supported, journeying along a wide, easy pathway of life from which there need be no return. This going with them from point to point of a London evening was a sharing of life in a way not possible in their own house, a sharing of experience that committed them to each other for good.

"A box, of course, is marvellous. A lodge in the wilderness. Which is why the French call them *loges*. In their *domestic* way. A temporary *chez-soi*. The English, delighting in separation, call them *boxes* ; things shut-in."

"Privacy, and freedom to come and go without assault and battery."

"True. But when you visit a picture-gallery do you prefer to look at the pictures from one side ? Not that one wants to *see* opera. I shall imagine the stage. Sit with my back to it."

"Don't. The point about this chap's music-dramas is that they are music-dramas. That is why they are such an admirable solvent. Be advised."

"There is no possible representation that can compete with the vast scenes his music brings to your mind. I shall see, with the lit stage behind me instead of the Queen's Hall orchestra in front, much bigger scenes than the stage could hold. No one can see and hear to perfection at the same moment. And the wonder of Wagner is that through your ears he makes you see so hugely. All humanity pouring itself into space. A huge, exciting world-party. *Your* musician, by the way. Beethoven and Bach are experiences and

adventures of the solitary human soul. In all its moods. Wagner is everybody speaking at once."

"He's a great chap. He's devised unprecedentedly splendid noises. His fault is a Germanic fault : a weakness for the redemption-idea."

The lights went down as if shocked, blotting out the crowded stalls with a uniform covering of luminous, bluish patches.

"They look like snow under moon-shadows."

"I *won't* have you away in Switzerland, Miriam," he murmured while she listened to the magic tinkling of rings and swishing of draperies as the curtains drew apart, and saw the light from the stage she did not mean to face fall upon the audience massed below.

But immediately she was aware that she would hamper him by having his face in sight as he leaned forward to look. Having had the last word, without which he could not rest, having fed his indispensable certainty of steering the situation, and having reached both ends by means of an adroit flattery, he was now free to descend into simplicity, impossible, to him, in presence of a witness.

He sat there with his mind on holiday. He had wanted an evening in town, a break with his long, enforced seclusion. Also to catch her in the full after-glow of her successful holiday and submit her under the best possible circumstances to the emotional solvent of music. It had all fitted most admirably and here he was, gladly back in London after his years of seclusion, in correct London clothes, complete with Gibus, seated in a box at the opera, between wife and lover-elect, with Wagner expressing the world in sound, restoring his confidence in the proportions of the human spirit, rousing and blessing his emotions and the emotions of the young lady at his side. It was all very good and all well in hand. But he must not be watched, obstructively.

So she turned a little sideways and saw over her right shoulder the glow of the stage.

The music swept by on its way to those who were in the direct line of its attack and left her incompletely attained. Free to think and to be consciously aware of the emotional tinge given to her thoughts by the mere presence of the tide of sound. A solvent, as he had said. But though now she knew why after standing, weary to begin with, for a whole evening listening

to orchestral music, she could walk home singing and full of happiness and strength, she could feel no sympathy with the planful tinkering with the hidden shape of things implied in his conscious, deliberate submitting of himself and her to a bath of music. A man's job perhaps. Yet to have a distinct end in view endangers both end and means. To know beforehand where you are going is to be going nowhere. Because it means you are nowhere to begin with. If you know where you are you can go anywhere, and it will be the same place, and good.

Still, his plan was working. But the emotions rising in her as she heard the massed music roll by and saw in her mind's eye the little figures on the stage whose voices boomed or yelled against the orchestral din, now reaching through, now lost in it altogether, were not those he intended. The tremendous ado, by its sheer size and strength and because through his mistaken technique of sitting in a box it was not having its full chance, was emphasising for her, in her detached coolness, all that it left unsaid, all that was said by the music of Bach – which would have been quite unsuited to his purpose : stillness, dailiness, the quiet, blissful

insight whose price is composure. The deep, quiet sense of *being* – what he called " turnip-emotion " – was more, even to these protesting people, than all of which they raved and shrieked. Perfect in itself. Every sound in the world, every protest and cry of agony, every relieving shriek of hysteria, was tribute to the sure knowledge of life's perfection. Otherwise, why *anything* ?

Senta's little spinning-song, heard in its setting, flowed forth from this knowledge. It prevailed against the earlier roaring of sea-music and would prevail against the din and fury of life in which she was to be caught. Singing to herself over her wheel, she was truth.

" Is there a good *German* effect ? " she asked in his ear.

" Lots of little Miriams in pigtails ; *look*," he answered, and she saw him off guard, simplified, too long ensconced in reactions to capture his usual form at a moment's notice.

Turning to the stage, she saw golden light, the warm gold of stage sunlight, long-haired maidens in full, bright skirts and dark velvet bodices laced across brief triangles of white muslin, Senta at her wheel in the midst :

long-haired, a thicker rope of plaited golden hair distinguishing her as the chosen representative of girlish felicity. Singing to herself over her wheel. Singing her sunlight and her being and her happiness. "Tragically brief." . . . Indestructible.

Back again with Hypo and Alma in their hotel lounge, she found that the music heard and the few scenes seen so unsatisfactorily sideways had yet reached to the depths of her being and seemed now to assail her, as she sat relaxed and strong, from the whole of surrounding space.

The cool lager poured down her throat in a single living stream.

"Bravo, Miriam! Ain't she splendid, Alma? Tossing off her beer like a man and smoking *con amore*."

Alma raised a hand to smooth her hair, and dropped the pearls she had been fingering with the other, to stifle a yawn.

Here, with the many palms giving green light and life to the little lounge, the evening seemed to begin. It was time to go, to drop away and face the walk home, alone, through the chilly midnight streets . . . that began to cast, as soon as a space of lamplit stillness lay

between her and the scene she had left, their old, unfailing spell. Unsharable. Although, to-night, the mellow, golden light, falling upon deserted roadway and silent grey stone building, was deepened by the glow of the hours from which she had come forth.

THE sudden lull seemed to call the attention of these separated groups to something they were missing. Two voices, one at either end of the long room, caught in mid-sentence, combined their conspicuous sounds for a moment and then fell into silence.

Talkers frozen in the attitude of conversation, listeners surprised at their task of keeping talkers going, relaxed in relief at the cessation or remaining tense, unconsciously revealing their various motives, glanced about the room as if looking for the cause of the interruption.

The gap was filled by the sound of the traffic pouring along the side of the square that was open to the main road. And now into the silence came the deep boom of a distant church clock, expanding its warmth through the chilly outer

twilight and pervading the room as though the silence were a space prepared for it. As the sixth stroke faded, the sound of the traffic emerged gay and headlong. Evening traffic, heralding the coming of darkness and the bright lights of the London streets.

A few voices had resumed, trying to prolong. But the quality of time had changed. It was no longer afternoon. The evenings of all the people in the room were flowing into their minds. Groups broke up and mingled in the to and fro of departure.

On her way to the door, Miriam was pulled up by the voice of a woman who had turned from a small group standing close at hand, hatless : residents. The voice had an eager, anxious, apologetic sound and gave her exit the air of royalty in procession, graciously halted to accept a petition.

Turning in the gloom hardly lessened at this end of the long room by the switching on of a distant, shaded light, she saw only a dim outline, a pale oval of face saluting her, obliquely down-tilted above a gown glowing silky rose-red through the dusk in which the forms of the other women showed no colour. Here was " charm," some strange grace and charm

that was defying the warning voice within. The figure, assuming as she confronted it a fresh attitude of graceful pleading, had now a level face whose eyes were smiling recognition, patiently-reproachfully, a much-tried adorer, who yet was making allowances, for too long an instant being forced to prompt and wait for an answering recognition. Inwardly protesting her extreme unrelatedness to this person moving so elegantly from pose to pose, yet attracted by the unaccountable glow, as if the rose-red gown shone for her in the gloom by its own light, and held by a curious intensity of being in the alien figure, Miriam waited unresponsive.

"You were talking of socialisme," said the girl, motionless in a final pose which she seemed to offer as part of her plea, head sideways downbent as if listening, arms held close to her silken form as if to subdue it to a touch of severity. "I would like, so much, to hear more of theece." Very young, but mannered and mature. An intelligent young French girl who would produce very "rational" difficulties.

Intent on escape, vaguely undertaking to be at the club again quite soon, Miriam received

a gracefully-sweeping movement of thanks and withdrawal during which the girl's eyes still held her own but with the recognising look withdrawn, as if now she were covering a moment's secret compact with a witness-disarming formality. With the corner of her eye as she turned away to the open door Miriam saw her, in the full light now switched on from the hall, move back to the styleless English group from which she had emerged, arms down, white hands a little extended as if to balance the slight swaying movement propelling her, and which the invisible feet followed rather than led.

Down in the street, where immediately the long continuous distances of past and future opened within the air, the little scene slipped into line with the series of momentary encounters staged by the club. The quality of that moment's exchange was complete in itself. Followed up by a definite appointment, it would have robbed this evening light and the evening streets of their power to evoke the continuous moment that was always and everywhere the same. Moving away from it unhampered, she was already losing its features, seeing it as a confirmation of the quality of the

long afternoon : the talk with those three implacable women who had responded with such blessed restorative flexible-mindedness while she talked with the eloquence of the despair that began now to fill her whenever she thought of people in large masses, against the theory of the permanent necessity for a more or less enslaved majority, to which their overheard conversation had made them seem so thoughtlessly docile ; the common adventure of the deepening twilight, the sudden silence, the deep-toned bell, the instant of seeing, from within its far sound, the strangeness of human life and its incompleteness.

As she broke in at Flaxman's to dress for Mrs. Redfern's evening, the memory of the girl returned as a teasing reminder, in a foreign voice, of a set of ideas that had ceased to move her unless they were attacked by someone holding another set.

WAKING next morning she found within the air the new spring, the inmost breath of the country springtime of which in her memory

there was no trace. It was strange to have no childhood memory of spring : nothing in memory but summer in full blaze, so that even the remembered sight of anemones in woods and of cowslip balls tossed from sister to sister, crushed, giving out their small warm scent, were surrounded not by a spring scene but by summer in full bloom.

Soft deep freshness of spring stirring within the dry, inorganic, beloved London air. This moment will be the best of this year's London spring unless I manage at last to keep my appointment with primroses. Each spring passes without sight of them, except for that one glimpse which was nothing but a reminder and a promise. All of us going along at sixes and sevens in the east wind. A skimpy cluster of trees at the wayside in the distance. Offering some kind of rescue when it should come near. Coming near enough to be one of the party and bring a slight change in everyone's feelings. Coming alongside. Three women adoring the small clumps pressed flatly against the earth amongst the short grass ; sunlit primroses. And those few in the midst, deeper and brighter for being in shadow. While we stood near the trees, the sky was radiant and the

cruel wind doomed by the promise of summer. Even the men, who only stood by, were caught and changed, lost for the instant during which they were as nothing to the three women, their hold on their great selves. Afterwards, going on, there were genial voices, relieved, gay voices of women prevailing, keeping warmth in the air.

And here again was the air of spring coming in at the thrown-up window with the light. But Sunday light. It was Sunday. Bringing a morning without pressure or hurry. Quietly. Setting all nature's allurements, all allurements, in a beautiful distance. Sunday morning, sweet and still and windless. Bringing its own quality that was independent of all others.

But the scent in the air that had brought memories of flowers was turning out to be the faint scent of soap. Assurance, through the distinctness with which it came from the far side of the room, of having waked from the deepest of deep sleep. From such distant deeps that now, with cool heart and eyes kept closed and mind recoiled from knowing that the air coming in through the rotten window-frame had passed over the cat-and-garbage-haunted waste between the farther slum and

the warren of Flaxman's, every outer thing was distinct in a life that from the earliest point of memory was the same.

This person who had stood for the first time alone upon the sunlit garden-path between the banks of flowers and watched them, through the pattern made by the bees sailing heavily across from bank to bank at the level of her face, and wondered at them all, flowers and bees and sunlight, at their all being there when nobody was about, and had looked for so long at the bright masses and now could re-see them with knowledge of their names and ways and of the dark earth underneath and still just as they were in that moment that had neither beginning nor end, this same person was now going, deceitfully, to local, social Lycurgan meetings, frequenting them, since Oberland, only for small delights that were the prelude, the practice-ground for more and more and more. This person, who was about to take a lover, presently, in time, at the right time, was the one who had gazed for ever at the flower-banks, unchanged.

Amongst the joys near at hand, merging into them, was the fun of dressing for these gatherings as for parties in the old days at home, going forth to meet not ideas, but people : to

see who was there. To like Mrs. Redfern's radiant hostess face, ruddy face, radiant last night above her evening gown, a glinting panoply about her well-built figure advancing across the room to say to a comparative stranger : "Good girl." Coming, at the moment of her firm hand-clasp, out of her preoccupations, revealing her desire for more than the distant acquaintance of secretary and group-member. And then, with eyes filming over as though she were going into a trance, announcing as consciousness forsook her and as if by way of apology for those so far gathered at her weekly meetings, in the manner of one heralding a Messiah, "He is *coming*," and a sigh expressing the end for ever of effort and responsibility, eyes still closed and lips ecstatically smiling. And, moving away with brightly opened eye amongst the increasing guests, her sturdy figure, animated by the twin currents of her emotions as Lycurgan and as hostess, seeming almost willowy as she glided about with her message and presently carried it through the open folding doors to where the earlier arrivals were standing with their coffee-cups, making prevail, over the confused sound of their talking, her blissful voice.

Piteous, harassed hostess, mistress of revels that had seemed all too tame to her burning fancy, blinded now by relief, unaware that she was insulting her guests in making such a to-do over the interloper for whom they were to be merely an admiring congregation. Or perhaps actually, as she had always seemed, delighted with each evening in turn, and now driven to an extremity of delight. But in so ecstatically describing the coming splendour she wrecked it by spreading, amongst the innocent, the wrong kind of anticipation and putting the others on their guard.

Going through the little crowd to the far end of the second room – where the usual gossipings and controversies were in full swing with the difference that everyone was now on the alert, turned towards the coming magnificence that for some was a challenge to their own and for others something to wait for with half-concealed impatience – there came that moment, turning round from securing a coffee at the end table, of being face to face with the tall old woman, flatly serge-clad and lace-collared as she had been on the platform of the Women's Group, stately and venerable, ripe with experience and yet young, as if living towards the future ; the

strange moment of being the short-range object of eyes that always looked at far distances, of feeling isolated with a challenge to accept or find reasons for refusing to interpret life according to whatever principles had given to her tall, upright form the bearing of a prophetess.

As she said "Who are you?" in the dry, sad voice so different from the one that had rung from the platform, the look of contemplation of wide distances moved from the eyes through which for a moment peeped forth a self-conscious schoolgirl. But that was because I was caught by my awful trick of suddenly being engrossed in a small object – a chain, a belt, or the way, flat affectionate way, a collar lies upon a dress : the individual power of these things and the strange, deceptive way they have of seeming to bestow their own soundness and well-being, even upon a person sick to death. But when I looked away, feeling ashamed and that everything between us was spoiled, the sense of her distance from myself and her attention to some large selfless plan came back.

"You are of the young who call themselves Socialists. But your feet are on the path. Go steadily."

"I'm a Tory-Anarchist."

Her eyes looked maternally, bringing a glow of childish satisfaction, a moment's sense of being free from the burden of independence, and immediately of feeling independence robbed of its rigidity, of being an independent person loaded with the jewels of youth and health, walking in the green valley of life far away below this old woman whose tall figure had grown broad and strong in climbing the steep middle years in midday sunlight till now she had reached to where perhaps feeling fades into thought. And then finding the charm of the party renewed by the brief absence. And gratefully, with the manner of a daughter, taking leave and moving away, just as Englehart came in at the main door. Flaming hair, pale eyes glinting with resolution. His whole being a torch peevishly seeking inflammable material, and held up by Mrs. Redfern in the empty middle of the room. Looking down on her from his height as upon something too tiresome even to be disposed of, and she sustaining the blaze with a brave dawning of her most roguish smile, kept back from attaining its fullness by the words with which she told her great news and by her eagerness for his pleased response.

"Is Goldstein here?" Nose-high air of a supercilious camel and, before she could answer, striding departure towards the densest group.

Englehart and Goldstein and Maynard intensively wrangling in the midst of an audience. Rachel, in deep, blended colours and low-falling, heavy beads; looking like a fragile trinket, perpetually breaking in with passionately scornful exclamations.

Mrs. Redfern again, saying, just as I had caught Englehart's eye and said "Tandem's worse than cart before horse" and seen his fury: "My cousin has fallen in love with you. Quite *demented*." And off she went, without indicating the cousin, to chant the praises of the messiah to new arrivals: "And not only *men*tally grand. So *beau*tiful. The most *beau*tiful creature in London."

Miscarried inspirations of a prospective audience too long kept waiting. Rachel's group, the lively group indifferent to the messiah, broken up and Rachel disappeared. And suddenly restored, close at hand. Eager to talk to one who had no single idea she could recognise as belonging to an intelligible system.

"Hullo, M. H.! How are you? How

nice you look ! You always do. But specially nice in that gown. Very, *very* nice. Don't you think so ? Don't you like yourself in it very much ? Are you alone, or with Michael ? *Isn't* it a queer gathering ? What are you doing so meekly in a corner ? " Pause. Glowering glance round room, and deep flush.

" Really people are incredible. I've just been telling that little skunk, Mason, he's a liar."

" Which is Mrs. Redfern's cousin ? "

" The Octopus ? Don't you *know* her ? Not a bit like Bertha Redfern. There she is, just beyond the fascinating Lena, with St. Vincent."

" St. Vincent and St. Vitus. Why doesn't she keep still ? "

" That intense creature ? "

" She's in love with me."

" The Octopus ? And you've never spoken to her ? She's not a lady to adore in silence."

" She's an aunt. Flirting with new ideas."

" An *aunt* ? That violent being ? "

" Short-circuiting in a frivolous world."

" Short-circuiting ! *She ?* "

" Who is the old woman in a lace collar and serge dress ? Sitting in the human landscape

like a dark rock in a green meadow. Not blending."

"Mrs. McCrosson. *Strange* being. A *much*-experienced lady."

"Not strange at all. She comes up from a deep dive unruffled and with open eyes. She reminds me, perhaps because of her age and calm wisdom, of an old woman who cruises about Bloomsbury looking qualified for an abdominal operation. But her steady, clear eyes keep it all in order. I go out of my way to pass her and meet them. She knows me, now, by sight. The odd thing is that she invariably appears when I am too miserable to go on living. She comes rolling by, and I am restored."

Rachel made her usual scientific objections. But listened. Eyebrows a little up, firm mouth and chin neglected by her will and slightly drooping together with her whole slender figure crouched in thought, while I tried to make her admit that *punctuality* in the coming through of the hidden shape of things *is* scientific evidence.

Why *mystical*? Why do these scientific people suppose that something supplying hints, when you are not looking for them, hints that overpower the voices of reason and common

sense, is more strange and mysterious than anything else? And a little dangerous and apt to be pathological? One might perhaps die of wonder if one could think hard enough over the fact of there being anything anywhere. And why not? If one could hold on when there comes the feeling that in a moment one will disappear into space. . . . But the moment of astonishment passes with the pang it gives and everything for a while is new and strange, as if one had been away on a long visit.

Presently she said that both ways of approach, the inner and the outer, should exist together in the ideal human being. She had a sort of nostalgia. Perhaps scientific people are intellectual saints and martyrs, sacrificed to usefulness.

"Who is Mrs. Redfern's latest messiah?"

"You mean Kingfisher, Arnold Kingfisher? Oh, a *most* brilliant creature and most *incredibly* beautiful."

And I waited for his arrival, eager to know which kind of adored male he was and forgot him, sitting in that corner of Mrs. Redfern's that became nowhere – except at that moment of seeing Redfern cross a clear space of the room driven by a superior force, arms bent,

mind in abeyance, head sideways up like a man in a football-scrum – while Rachel, listening, gave added warmth to all I told her of my guilty life ; innocently, with her way of finding all well if life goes pleasantly.

" I knew I should get away from Flaxman's and from Selina. According to you, having decided I must go, I ought to have made a *plan*. I didn't. Feeling myself gone, I began to like the place and to find Selina less overpowering. It was *she* who made a plan. Suddenly told me she must get nearer her work and asked me if I'd like to move."

" You think that was a feeler ? "

" Don't know. It's easier to read Selina's thoughts than her feelings. But in the end she betrayed feeling. Suddenly appeared in the middle of the morning at Wimpole Street. I sailed into the waiting-room, sailed, so deep was my astonishment, through all the memories laid up for me in the house, things I had ceased attending to and that would most strongly have aroused Selina's interest and envy . . ."

" Beast ! "

" . . . envy if she were in the habit of encouraging envy and were not a Christian stoic – but I've seen envy touch her, just prod at her

from within and be crushed back by her strong, Christian stoical lips and turned into a momentary and perhaps fortifying sharing of a life that to her has been a gay panorama available for her contemplation for nearly eighteen months. You see? Something she can't mould or change, something independent of her and secretive, of which she does not quite approve and yet, as you will see, has grown to have an acquired taste for. Something authentic in a way that does not fit her scheme of authenticities and therefore attracts her. Appeals to her charitable broad-mindedness. She is fed and starved by turns."

"Vain creature."

"Not a bit. It has nothing to do with me, and is as much of a mystery to me as to her."

"Proceed with your story."

"Well, here it grows pathetic. At the end of my glorious promenade from my room to the waiting-room door, I realised that it had been so glorious because Selina had come uncalled into the midst of one of my worlds and brought it all clearly round me from its beginnings, made it magic and new in all its distances as it had been at the first and shall be for ever amen

when I get away and it seems to fold up like a scroll."

"*Are* you going away from that, too?"

"Of course, presently. It is finished, has been finished for some time, though there's a large homesick half of me that wants it to go for ever; as, of course, everything *does*."

"Nonsense. Proceed."

"Of course everything is eternal, or it is nothing."

"Suffering, for instance, oppression, cruelty, lives that are crushed, ruined, hideous."

"All that is part of something else. Vicarious suffering is the only kind that instructs."

"A *most* convenient theory."

"You and I are vicarious sufferers, gutter-snipes, poor-law children, under-paid wage-slaves without security or prospects, dancing at the edge of an abyss."

"True, but you seem to enjoy it. Go back to your story."

"The prices of security, especially for women, are a damned sight too tall. Monstrous. Unthinkable. Who wouldn't sooner die than suffocate, even on an altar with incense perpetually rising?"

"Plenty of people, millions, my dear, would

choose suffocation, if it is suffocation. I'm not sure."

"I am. All the homes I know are asphyxiating."

"Cease these wanderings. Tell me of your Selina."

"Well, yes. In that moment outside the door she *was* my Selina, it was as if quite suddenly a large long *life* stood accomplished behind us and there we were, meeting each with a solid piece of eternity in hand. Now isn't that sort of thing wonderful, untouchable, whatever may happen afterwards? And all the time I was wondering what could have happened in the hour or so since I left her at Flaxman's. And knowing it was good. All of which, stated simply, in a brief poetic lie, would run: 'I was pleased to see Selina.' That's somehow plain and powerful. A man's statement, carrying one sanguinely along the surface of life that is so plain and simple-oh. 'Tell me, my dear, exactly what you mean, in a few words.' My God! Ain't they the ultimate limit? The mere thought of all those men torturing with their thin logic the inarticulate women whose deep feelings *must* throw up cascades of words or slay them. . . .

Well, with great embarrassment, she told me she wished to stay at Flaxman's and keep on our life together."

"So you stay?"

"I thought so; I was *thrilled*. But I heard myself saying, explaining, that I had arranged to join a friend at Tansley Street. Not a word of truth in it."

"False creature."

She meant it, and yet robbed the flight from Selina of its feeling of guilt. And then she must have sat silent, contemplating beyond my knowledge according to some chosen system of psychology, for I thought, helped by her presence, her self concentrated on me, of next week, of returning to Mrs. Bailey to the old untouched freedom with clear knowledge of what to do with it. Undisturbed space, high above the quiet street, and safely below the old attic with its cruel cold and its sultry stifling heat.

And then Mrs. Redfern's party was there again suddenly, a bright scene in a world freshly created, people moving in a room of long ago, recognised one by one, and Rachel, reduced to the scale of the evening, was saying:

"This man's not coming."

Everyone, during the time of waiting, had plunged more or less into far-off spaces from which they had returned refreshed, seeing anew, in the perspectives lit by the promise of the great arrival, the group and its aims. Only those who must always batten externally, on what is going on around them, were weary because nothing seemed to be happening.

And Kingfisher never came. And there was no prize-fight between the purveyors of wit and wisdom, no struggle between opposing councils of perfection, no dynamic leadership towards a distant aim, but presently a friendly deep sense of life, a sense of current being, shared. A deep power, against which no single assertive individual could prevail, something like a Quaker meeting, after Englehart and his party, already thrown out of their usual form by enforced abdication in favour of the promised Kingfisher, had gone impatiently away. Only Rachel was left to represent the hard edge and she, in the end, admitted the vitalising quality of the hour.

To-day, being Sunday, will keep intact for several hours this morning sense of spring. Sunday morning stands in eternity and gathers all its fellows from the past. Now that it is

here, it is no longer the last Sunday with Selina but an extension of all our Sundays together. Until the late afternoon, when tomorrow will pour in over the surface of the hours.

Across the featureless, blissful moment came a vision of the girl posed, her red gown glowing through the dark, clear for a second and then gone, but in the far distances of the afternoon the thought of her made a barrier beyond which nothing could be seen. Even this last day had already passed out of Selina's hands.

OF course there was no one at the club at this unlikely hour, not even a resident sitting about with its air of being in possession. The well-fed members were resting in their rooms. In this long, empty drawing-room, with morning gone and the afternoon not yet begun, was the end of the world. Life far away, past and done with. The atmosphere of the room, coldly neutral, engulfed feelings and opinions and mocked at the illusions created by mere coming and going. It mocked and weighed

and judged. And there was nothing to oppose to it. Nothing to do but stand alone, judged and condemned, here in this corner by the window, giving on to the square whose garden must be yielding a deep sense of spring. Spring going its independent way.

Turning from the window she faced the open piano, contemplating the alien keys she had never touched and that held the secrets of those who had played upon them and had thwarted the aspirations of those who had strummed. And held the living sound of the music that was now tingling to her finger-tips. In a moment she was back within the strange centre of being she had left on a vain quest, ensconced behind its endless refusal to accept evidence. She stood very still within the stillness it made beneath the glad tumult awakened in her by the returning tide. There was no direct answer to the emptiness about her that still made its assertions. But there was statement. Just sanity re-asserting itself after a mild shock? More than that. Her external being, standing here with finger-tips responsive to the challenge of the exposed keys, in no way represented the essential opposition. Yet it was with that consciously reflecting

being that she felt the unchanging presence that now joined her in the world it had restored. Everything in the room had a quiet reality, and glancing through the window she saw how the budding trees thrilled in the sunlight.

Through the sound of her soft playing she heard the click of the door. Seemed herself to be outside it, opening it upon music barely heard from another room and that now, subdued though it was, seemed by comparison with that distant sound to peal out in honour of someone entering in triumph. Holding to her theme she planned to pass from its nearing end without a break to another that would hold her within this secret world that had opened so unusually from out the lowest point in the afternoon. But the intention gave emphasis to the movements of her hands and presently she was just carefully playing, sharing her music with someone crept cautiously into the room ; one or other of the residents now probably hidden in a deep chair and presently to sound its thanks and say it loved music.

It was only because it could be no one else that she recognised this girl crouched on the floor at her side – looking as if she had blossomed from the air – as yesterday's figure in

the rose-red gown, again producing the effect of being aware of the impression she made and contemplating it in the person of the one upon whom it was being directed and also, to-day, offering it as something to be judged, like a "work of art," detachedly, upon its merits.

The mealy, turquoise blue of the delicately figured kimono was deep satisfaction, so also were the heavy beads, of curiously blended, opaque deep colours, hanging in a loop whose base, against the girl's knees, was clasped by twining fingers. Smoothly draped sheeny dark hair framed the flower-fresh oval face and heightened the "jasmine" white of the column of neck. And this unknown loveliness was already radiating affection, patiently awaiting the fruit of a wondering stare ; wordlessly, for fear of risking by sound or movement its own full effect.

When Miriam smiled, the girl dropped her beads and re-asserted herself with an emphatic movement, defying or insisting or imploring, that left her face upturned as if for easier reading. And then her hands came forward, one ahead of the other, smallish womanish hands, not very expressive, and dropped again

to her knees. She was on her feet, had become a figure, fleeing, on soundless feet, down the long room whose social life, flowing back to it as she plunged lightly on slippered feet, with the wings of her kimono fluttering to the swiftness of her movement, through its lights and shadows, was turned to nothing, as if its being as a club-room had waited all along for this transfiguring moment.

Ensconced in a corner of the low settee she was so retreated into dimness that her mocking little laugh made Miriam, following her down the room, half expect to find her transformed. The eager, coquettish little trill suggested endless tiresomeness. But the girl, somehow aware of the false sound, quenched it with another, a cooing, consoling, deprecating laugh-sound that made together with the first a single communication : in spite of her brave, amazing silence she found it necessary somehow to fill with her image the interval during which she was invisible.

"I'm not sure I should have recognised you," said Miriam. At the sound of her own familiar voice a gulf seemed leapt. But of the one who spoke, come from afar to meet this strange girl, she knew nothing. Serenely

she took the other corner of the settee, feeling as she sat down that she had embarked in sunlight upon an unknown quest.

With another of her swift movements the girl was on her knees, upright, her face held motionless towards the full light. Again Miriam surveyed. Something had gone. There was thought behind the lovely silent mask, and speech on the way.

"It's like a peach. Say it, say it."

"It is," said Miriam, admiring the girl's open appreciation of her own beauty, at this moment newly created for her in eyes into which she gazed as into a mirror.

"But not so *much*, since Basil." She waited, eyebrows up and painfully drawn together. Communication was severed. Miriam realised, by its sudden withdrawal, that a moment ago the room had seemed filled with golden light giving an ethereal quality to all its contents. Now they stood distinct in a light that was dark and bitter and cold. Yet this girl was different from the women who at once begin to talk of their personal relationships, and though she felt her face grow weary in anticipation of moving away from their two selves into the story of a life the girl shared with another,

which, if it greatly mattered to her, robbed this strange meeting of its chief value, she felt her interest awake behind her suffering.

" It spoils thee corners of thee mouth," she whispered sadly, " They are never again so cleare and firm."

Another sadness, a revelation spreading itself abroad over all humanity, added its bitterness to the surrounding air, but before thought could beat back and find words, the girl said wistfully :

" This makes a difference ? You are repelled ? "

" No," she said eagerly. " it makes no difference," and within the glow of her admiration for sincerity she felt the lie turn to truth, and added : " with you."

" But yes," she insisted, " it must make some difference. With all these women here, it would. It divides me from them. They are pewre. I feel a barrier."

Miriam thought of the residents she knew by sight. The pretty, sour-mouthed one who spent all her leisure at St. Albans and was always quoting Father Stanton, the too-motherly widow and her hysterical daughter, the small dark woman who darted about and

sang snatches of song in a way seeming to express nothing but impatience with everyone within sight, the various "workers" who were either too chatty and cheerful, stoically cheerful, a little mannish, or official and supercilious and thoroughly discontented.

"Without telling them, I cannot get near them. And to Englishwomen one cannot tell these things."

"But you've told me."

A sudden inner laughter glowed from the girl's face, compressing her lips and narrowing her eyes that for a second turned away in contemplation of a private source of amusement, as if some memory or knowledge of hers were being confirmed, and from which she returned fully aware that she held a soaring advantage, but not knowing the depth of repudiation she had aroused, to rival her strange spell, repudiation of the foreign quality of her intelligence, French intelligence with fixed wisdoms and generalisations.

"Yes, you are English, that is the strange thing," she remarked in a polite, judicial tone, "and so *different*," she added, head sideways, with an adoring smile and a low voice thrilling with emotion. Her hands came forward, one

before the other, outstretched, very gently approaching, and while Miriam read in the girl's eyes the reflection of her own motionless yielding, the hands moved apart and it was the lovely face that touched her first, suddenly and softly dropped upon her knees that now were gently clasped on either side by the small hands.

Alone with the strange burden, confronting empty space, Miriam supposed she ought to stroke the hair, but was withheld, held, unbreathing, in a quietude of well-being that was careless of her own demand for some outward response. She felt complete as she was, brooding apart in an intensity of being that flowed refreshingly through all her limbs and went from her in a radiance that seemed to exist for herself alone and could not be apparent to the hidden girl.

Who now lifted her face and said, smiling a younger, simpler smile, relieved, gay, with a little flash of the teeth before the lips spoke, like a child who has dared and triumphed : "I *knew*. You are *more* what I thought, than I thought you were," and gazed, head thrown back, hands clasped firmly on the deserted knees, and laughed her early, cooing laugh and

leapt lightly to her feet and was ensconced once more upon the deep settee.

"Are you living in London or just staying ?"

"I do not know if I will stay. There are so many things here that make me not as I would be. After Paris."

"For example ?"

"I could give so many examples. Chiefly it is the way of living, the little things of every day. And there is your Eenglish foode." She shrugged her shoulders and draped her kimono more closely as if withdrawing from the chill discomforts of life in England ; that yet she was living so easily in this quite well-run little club. The shadow her critical tone cast over the background of their meeting, over her London as she knew it, in makeshift poverty of which this girl had no experience, saddened Miriam, forcing her to realise that the wide separation of their circumstances would play its obstructive part as soon as they reached personal details. She herself, her way of living, the lack in it of anything that could charm a fastidious little *grande-dame* in the making, would presently be identified with the uncongenial London about to be left to its fate. But "Basil" was an Englishman ?

But though so bravely determined to reveal herself at once and keep nothing back, she clearly disliked direct questions. Or, if not actually disliking them, received them with a ceremonial that made them seem crude, and therefore certainly offensive to her. First silence and a fresh pose of her whole person, a plastic pose, studied and graceful, and a careful, conscious management of the accompanying facial effects that preceded her answer: a statement, seeming at first irrelevant and presently revealing consistency – so that her talk bore no resemblance, never would bear any resemblance to the Englishwoman's well-bred incoherence – and contributing to her effect of being critically aloof from everything but her own power to charm.

Just as Miriam began clearly to realise both how very weary she could grow of the plastic poses and that she herself was not playing the part expected of her, the girl broke off and sank in a graceful heap on the floor, where she sat crouched and once more silently adoring.

Towards tea-time it was only with an effort that she could remember whither she was bound. Her current life had grown remote and unreal. As empty and turned away and

indifferent as the far corners of this club-room so strangely free, as if deliberately kept free of intruders, for the hour during which she had sat enthroned and talking : being " drawn out " and set and kept upon a pinnacle and worshipped for wisdom and purity. Seeing herself reflected in the perceptions of this girl she was unable to deny, in the raw material of her disposition, an unconscious quality of the kind that was being ascribed to her so rapturously. But it was not herself, her whole current self. It belonged to her family and her type, and for this inalienable substratum of her being she could claim no credit. Yet in being apparently all that was visible, and attractive, to this socially experienced and disillusioned and clear-eyed young woman, it seemed to threaten her. She could feel, almost watch it coming forth in response to the demand, thoughtlessly and effortlessly, feel how it kept her sitting perfectly still and yet vibrant and alight from head to feet, patiently representing, authentic. And a patient sadness filled her. For if indeed, as her own ears and the confident rejoicing that greeted every word she spoke seemed to prove, this emerging quality were the very root of her being, then

she was committed for life to the rôle allotted to her by the kneeling girl.

In the end, supplied bit by bit, by hints and responses, sometimes just exclamations illuminating by their ecstatic suddenness that which called them forth, with a portrait of herself in all its limitations, as she existed in the mind of the girl, it seemed almost as if this girl had come at just this moment to warn her, to give her the courage of herself as she was, isolated and virginal. Yet, as she stood at last taking leave of her in the centre of the twilit room, facing again her strange beauty gleaming in the space it illuminated, she was glad to be escaping back into the company of people who moved mostly along the surface levels and left her to herself.

WITH so many small movables gone on, the strip of room looked exactly as it had done when the furniture was first brought in, and again, as she went candle in hand down the pathway of green linoleum, she felt with all its first freshness, as in the sacred days before the

surrounding neighbourhood stated its misery, the deep, early morning charm radiating from the little polished bureau and its slender brass candlesticks, the long mirror in its dark frame and the moss-green enamel of the toilet-set with its pools of light. And especially the long lasting of the early morning charm on that first Sunday morning, before the thunderstorm had brought the poet to his window with waving arms.

She would remember these rooms as early morning light pouring from the high window along the green pathway and reflected in their different ways by the bureau, the mirror and the crockery : the quiet deep bliss of it. Bliss that would remain unchanged and gradually spread its quality even over the shallow months since she had moved her bed away from the night-sounds of the court into the little back room, amongst Selina's battered sitting-room furniture from which there was no escape in looking up at the ancient painted ceiling or out through the small window whose dim, shabby curtains, faded and dusty, seemed to match the dismal waste between it and the opposite slum ; and over all the memories of Flaxman's, crowding together, each in turn coming

forward with its teasing question and merging again into the crowd with its question unanswered.

And they were going with her into the new, old life, the bureau and the moss-green crockery and the black-framed mirror. Somewhere in her vast house Mrs. Bailey would find room for the things they would displace? She had not thought of that, nor of any tiresome detail, either at Wimpole Street when Selina made her belated plea and she had improvised her plan and based it on a lie, or in going round to tell the delighted Mrs. Bailey. Had thought of nothing but going home to Tansley Street.

She set her candle on the bureau and sat down to find her list of bills. This was the end of bills and items. In future there would be nothing but the weekly sum for Mrs. Bailey, passing almost furtively from hand to hand with a genuine pretence on both sides that there was between them no relationship of payer and paid. To-morrow, she would be at home.

In place of this large room, divided by the crash curtain – Selina should have curtain and linoleum and everything else they held in common – and the small sitting-room and huge

attic, there would be one small, narrow room.

But all round it, in place of the cooping and perpetual confrontations of Flaxman life, the high, spacious house whose every staircase she knew and loved in each of its minutest difference from its fellows, of shape and colour and texture and lighting, of everything that makes up the adventure of ascending and descending flights of stairs – absent in Flaxman's from all but the remote little top flight beyond the reach of the reek and murk coming up from the basement, absent because of the close pressure of the lives in the house and in the surrounding slum ; lives she was powerless to change or to endure – and every room, where, extending even into those she had never entered, richly her own life was stored up.

And the doors with their different voices in shutting or being slammed-to by the wind. Would she remember Flaxman door-sounds after she had left ? Glancing at the door which ended the long strip of her half of the room she tried in vain to remember its sound. Yet when she first settled in it must have impressed itself and played its intimate part in the symphony of sounds belonging to her life with Selina. She tried for the attic door upstairs and even that

refused to return. No indoor sounds would stay on with her from this house : because after the first few weeks her senses had never been at home, had always been a little on the alert, uneasy, half-consciously watchful for assaults from downstairs and from outside, pressing too closely and difficult to resist.

But the sound of each of the Tansley Street doors came back at once, and some stood out clearly from the others. The dining-room door, quiet, slowly moving because of its size and weight, closing solidly with a deep wooden sound, slamming, very rarely, with a detonation that went up through the house. The state bedroom behind it, whose door moved slowly and discreetly on its hinges over a fairly thickish carpet and shut with a light, wooden sound. The door of the little draughty room at the end of the passage clapping abruptly to over its thin linoleum with a comfortless metallic rattle of its loose fastening. The upstairs drawing-room's softly, silkily closing door, a well-mannered, muffled sound, as if it were intent on doing its duty in such a way as not to interrupt the social life going on within. And, higher up, the heavy brown doors of the second-floor bedrooms, still with wooden knobs like

those below, closing leisurely and importantly, seeming to demand the respect due to the prices of the rooms they guarded ; and the rooms above, whose yellow, varnished doors shut lightly and quickly, one with a soft brassy click, very neat and final, one with a sharp rattle of its loose metal knob echoing over the linoleum-covered stairs and landings of the upper floors.

All beloved. For a moment she listened to the prolonged squeak, running cheerfully up the scale and ceasing suddenly as the door stood wide, that was the voice of her old garret. But the breathless midsummer heat and the cruel, hampering cold she had endured there in fireless winters and condoned and explained away and somehow exorcised so long as they had been the inevitable prices of survival, came forward now to condemn the room that was no longer hers and she turned with joy and gratitude to hear the light, high sound, shut away, scarcely audible, of the remote door of the small strip of room beyond the turn of the stairs as they wound up to the attics. Heard it close, unbelievably, behind her and leave her ensconced, high above the quiet street. In the house, but not too much of it. Supported and screened

by the presence of the many rooms that made the large house ; each one occupied by strangers who soon, just because she need establish with them no exacting personal relationship, would be richly and deeply her housemates, sharing the independent life of this particular house, its situation within London's magic circle, its early mornings, its evenings and nights, all bathed in the quietude of the comely street and blessed by the neighbourhood of the green squares at its either end.

Freedom.

Freedom for thought, when it made its sudden visits, to expand unhampered by the awful suggestions coming from the Flaxman surroundings. To sit down unobserved and endlessly free from interruption at this little bureau that now could fulfil the promise for which it was bought.

She became aware of her framed mirror on the wall behind her, reflecting in its narrow length her form seated in the shadowy candle-light she was so soon to leave for the cheerful blaze of gas, or the steady companionship of the reading-lamp that at Flaxmans' she had hardly used at all, and half turned to look into

it and exchange over her shoulder a smile of congratulation with her reflected image.

The glass was not clear. Across her face, that should have shown in the reflected candlelight, was some kind of cloudy blur. Holding up the candle she found lettering, large and twirly, thickly outlined as if made with chalk or moist putty, moving with a downward slope across the centre of the strip of glass. Mystified – for who in the wide world could have had access to her room, or, achieving it, should be moved to deface her mirror in a manner suggesting it was for sale ? – and disturbed by the unaccountable presence that had been silently witnessing, unpardonably mocking it seemed to her as she pushed away the chair and stood aside to let the candlelight fall full upon the strange apparition, at her private rejoicings.

"*I love you*," it said.

With the feeling of coming down and down from a far-away upper distance, a physical sensation of rhythmic descent down and down, her consciousness arrived in the moment and paused, looking out through the eyes of her body at the shadowy semblance left in the room : the figure of the girl secretly and swiftly coming and going, in outdoor garb,

cloak or loose coat, something swaying and flowing with her movements, unenglishly.

She must have discovered the address at the club, come round here on an impulse and immediately encountered Selina. Selina, in her old dressing-gown and with a candle guttering in her battered candlestick, peering out into the darkness, a little suspicious of the foreign voice and the poses and the extraordinary request that must have followed their brief conversation. Or perhaps already dressed for her evening lecture and therefore feeling relatively sporting and dare-devil and, at once won over, preceding her upstairs and admitting her for a moment to this room, alone, probably lighting for her this very candle, and coming in to blow it out again after she had shown her downstairs.

With a swift blush, while she assured herself that in the dim light she would not have observed it, she wondered whether Selina had seen the writing on the mirror.

SPARROWS were tweeting on the leads outside the office and the servants had carried all the house-plants out into the lightly pittering rain. There was gold on the rain-wet leads and then grey for a while as again the rain fell, until once more its lessening drops were sunned to gold and ceased. The fresh smell of damp earth came in at the open door.

To-morrow morning, at dawn, if I happen – the bell of the wall-telephone sounded from its corner to which she went, away from her table within the freshness of the outer air and the radiance of morning light streaming in through the open door, across the short diagonal into the room's outer world, into the lesser light warmed by the yellow-gold wall-paper, into the flavourless, dry, house-air, and into sight through the glass of the opposite door, of the stately perspective of staircase and high, shadowy hall and high archway nowadays austere, clear of Mrs. Orly's striped curtains with their unspeakable, pathetic, unforgettable tie-backs of transverse stripes, and the forehall leading along past the seated manservant to the dark wings of the closed door gloomily asheen beneath its clouded fanlight – with only the beginning of a friendly movement of her mind

towards patients in their wealthy homes and this useful link between them and the house extending above and below her perched room, and lately more than ever beloved because with no release in sight she yet seemed already to be living in it in retrospect.

So that it was herself and not quite herself who lifted the receiver and looked down the long staircase up and down which she had run so many thousands of times, each time, even when fatigue or summer heat retarded her steps, with an emotion independent of that aroused by whatever made the journey necessary, sometimes so strong as temporarily to make her forget her errand, sometimes reduced by a particular urgency almost to nothing, but always arriving the moment she started and continuing – making the experience of being on the stairs with the wide eloquent spaces above and below and all about her set in motion by movement, and the beings of the many inmates, and even her own being, momentarily further than usual from her mind and therefore in clearer focus, something distinct from the rest of her life in the house – until she arrived at her destination with a sense of return to a world from which she seemed to have been

absent for much longer than the time required for the journey.

Pretty Mrs. Ffoljambe on a visit . . . the year Persimmon won the Derby . . . held up, by a patient being interviewed in the hall, and dancing with impatience on this landing that to her was nothing but a stage on the journey from her bedroom down through the professional part of the house to the cheerful den far away beyond the back of the hall through which her arrived, gay friends had just charged in a silence as unnatural as her own.

Glad to escape from her and her universe where women were judged by their looks and men by their incomes, I whispered, with simulated gallantry, I'll hurl myself downstairs and find out for you. Thanks hawfully, she said, but don't break a limb.

Into the receiver came the voice of Mrs. Orly. Her telephone voice : thin and hurried, its usual note of anxious solicitude increased by her incurable impatience with the mechanism, and whispering, as if still she were living here in the house and conveying, through the hall speaking-tube, some urgent message to her husband in his surgery. Her whole self came through, the image of her in hurried speech,

the sallow little face worried and frowning, the sweet, radiant eyes a little clouded.

Intent upon the little figure on tiptoe at the wall-telephone fixed in the roomy hall at a level arranged for the convenience of her tall, unreflecting menfolk, Miriam had missed the meaning of the first words, but the anxious voice went on and she felt all the warmth of her being gather itself to sound in her reply to the flustered little phrases.

And when she returned to her table, the vision of the evening glowing so pleasantly from the midst of next week owed the whole of its charm to the certainty of the pervasive little presence and the perfect incoherence that so often in the past had provoked her to be unkind.

Whilst going on with her work she saw the vast ex-studio in the Orlys' Hampstead retreat approached, after dinner (during which hearing "all about Oberland" would have been a few questions colliding with each other across the table and answered at cross-purposes to the accompaniment of family wrangling that held no core of bitterness, and then a little of Mr. and Mrs. Orly's reminiscences and, filling the spaces between the different consciousnesses

moving towards each other and failing to meet, the beauty of Switzerland, lingering in the mind of each one), through the fern-lined, high glass corridor, looking at first gloomy because of its size and the way, above the shaded, standard lamps, the darkness went up towards the cold sheen of the glass roof, and presently becoming a continuation of the old den, though here the Orly voices caught up and echoing in the enormous room sounded less assured, and all they stood for much more remote, than on the old background.

And some time during the evening, since the scholarly aunt is to be there and will want to hear about Reich's last lecture, ideas will creep in :

The great unassailed inland empires slumbering in superstition, producing grotesque art and no thought. The Ægean islanders, always on the qui vive, fighting for their lives, producing Homer. Spreading westwards : Greece. The little Hebrews on their strip of coast, living dramatically, producing a great literature. The Romans a military camp, spreading and conquering, making Empire and Law. Their descendants the island English, sailors, soldiers,

merchants and, presently, the world's greatest poet. And now asleep in prosperity while in the midst of Europe rises a brutal menace.

His last words : " Ladies and gentlemen, I am a Hungarian patriot. Germany prepares for war. Europe knows it. Before this century is ten years old, England will know it. Perchance too late. If I can open your eyes, I shall not have lived in vain. You, and you alone, can save Europe, can save my native land who will receive, on the morning war is declared, a post-card bidding it cease to exist."

If I can put all that *clearly* before their eyes, there will be silence for a moment and Mrs. Orly's voice will sound into the midst of the workings of their various minds, asking a question about Reich, compelling even a European situation to behave, to serve the purposes of kindly living.

Mr. Orly will quote *Anglo-Saxon Supremacy* and sigh gustily and look about for his African tobacco-pouch, to carry off his embarrassment over his own emotion. And Mr. Leyton will intone " My house and thy house are half the world's goods " and will remark that if the old boy turns out to be right, the Boer War has

taught us we're a C 3 nation just about in time, and cross his legs and look stern and capable.

And the walls will have grown transparent to gloomy threats and the high roof ceased to be a shelter. Until Mr. Orly sings "Gunga Din" and "My Snowy-breasted Pearl" and their house becomes itself again.

But long before that, *to-morrow morning, at dawn, if I happen to wake, I shall breathe the freshness of morning from a Tansley Street window.*

From within the deep distances enclosed by the railings of the squares the life-breath of the trees would steal towards her from either end of the street.

Here, going on with her work in the sane morning light, with rain-damp earthy scents streaming in from the potted mould of the house-plants, she felt the heart's ease of going home with a deeper rapture than in yesterday's excited twilight; felt an actual melting and streaming away from below her heart of the oppression that must have been gathering there through all the time at Flaxman's.

Whatever else awaited her at Tansley Street, these moments waited there. And daily moments of return to a solitude that whenever

she crossed the threshold of her empty room ceased to be solitude.

The gentle burr of Mr. Hancock's summoning bell took her eyes to the clock as she rose to answer it. Mr. Cleeke, narrow head, narrow, cold voice, narrowly specialised mind, must still be here. Going upstairs she heard in her mind the refined, undulating, deliberately challenging voice of Mrs. Cleeke. Like so many of the wives of professional husbands she seemed to be both her husband's guardian and a masked being who betrayed, by the emphasis of her statements, how little of her inward self was behind what she said. An eager, busy, well-dressed ghost, fearful of anything that seemed to threaten the system of ideas she had married. Wearing her husband's attainments as a personal decoration, she was really indifferent to the system within which she spent her outward life, aware of a world where it had no importance, perhaps taking refuge in it when she was alone. She might say briskly : " One must be alone at times " . . . or, " I'm quite *fond* of my own society, occasionally." But the solitude this kind of woman suggested would be populous with humorous, commonsense reflections on life and humanity. Never quite at home in

solitude, she and her kind missed the essential both in society and in solitude : the coming to life of the surrounding air, the awareness that within it is a life-breath ; in-pouring. Not one of these women would be passionately shocked by the intruder who comes in vocally, assuming there is no one in the room but its visible occupant, or by the person who looks anxiously from one to another of a momentarily silent gathering, in wait for the next move.

Crossing the room to reach her corner she felt the glow of agreement coming from the window-space where Mr. Hancock stood beside his cabinet mixing amalgam with the remains of his most delighted smile wavering below the calm, obstinate brow and Mr. Threele at ease in the chair facing the stained glass window's flitting brown butterflies with the remains of his *quod erat* half-smile still creasing his clever face.

" And the sooner the general public can be made to realise it the better," said Mr. Hancock gravely, with a final forceful sweep of the spatula, and turned to pack the patient's mouth with absorbents.

Dreadnoughts.

Can it be true that my assignation with to-morrow's dawn owes it security to Dreadnoughts ?

After the dawn, if Mag and Jan were still at Kenneth Street, the first Sunday morning in the old house, the part beginning just after breakfast and probably finding her feeling she had never gone away. . . .

The Flaxman time would roll up and vanish, for there would be nothing to recall it. She and Selina had left no mark on each other, exchanged no thoughts, no confidences, not even small gifts. . . .

Perrance. Perrance's alabaster finger, packed in her luggage, impossible to abandon or give away, a reminding, undesired tribute to what in his mistaken eyes she stood for, something bred in her, remaining, friend and enemy by turns. Selina had seen and been won by it at first and then lost sight of it because she called out the self that was opposed to all its standards.

The strange girl had seen it and nothing else at all. Had insisted on it. And left it a message . . . at *Flaxman's*. Am-a-bel, calling herself by her own name, as if at once insisting on her smallness and pathos in a great world and her equality to all its forces, had triumphed,

without knowing what she was doing, over the impossibility of breaking in at Flaxman's and, unless she should suddenly disappear, would for ever represent it, the whole of it complete in all its detail, lying behind the small glimpse she was now carrying about as part of her knowledge of her new friend.

Perhaps she would disappear. Go back to Paris as she had hinted. There was no link between her and Tansley Street. And need be none for many days. . . .

"The fact is, we've been asleep."

"The British bull-dog, eh, snoring in his comfy kennel?"

"Exactly. A little wider, please."

After to-night, after more or less publicly settling in, it would be as though she had never been away and to-morrow morning – thanks to Dreadnoughts? – she would hear the familiar house-sounds and, although the toneless echo of St. Pancras bells would no longer thud in her chimney – drawing her seeking glance, when she was too preoccupied to remember she could not *see* the sounds, towards its small black aperture that after each thump held a fumbling rumour as if something were moving visibly in the sooty cavity – in that fourth-floor

room she would hear them as clearly as before : those first, new, clear, morning notes swinging one by one steadily down the scale and again and again and again until presently she forgot them, ceased to pay attention to the single sounds while still aware of their presence in the increased quality of the light in the room, and presently was reminded that the bells were still at their task by the sudden dead stop, announcing the hymn-tune that broke into the stillness with such appealing lack of confidence, tapping out its bell-notes slowly and carefully, like an untrained musician picking out a tune with one finger ; each note sweetly, gently, touching the Sunday morning air, and at the end of the last line the uncertain upward dab at a top-note never fully reached, left standing high in the air, perfectly, satisfyingly flat, for too brief a second, so that all one's being, in order not to miss its perfection, in order just to accompany and catch it before its profane comment was covered by the urgent crashing of the final cascades, had to become an attentive ear.

And all the other street-sounds. The pealing voice of the newspaper boy would still come up from far enough below to describe to

her mind's eye the height of the confronting rows of quiet grey balconied houses and, with the briefness of its stay, accompanied by the painty crackling open of large front-doors, low-toned words clearly audible, calling up a picture of boy and buyer pleasantly in league, and the quiet satisfied wooden flump of each leisurely closed door, to tell of its perfect length between tree-filled square and tree-filled square.

Revelling in every single, blessed sound indoors and out and then for a moment undecided between one and another of the many ways of spending the vast morning. No need to unpack. Mrs Bailey would only smile, indulgently, if her luggage hung about for weeks, for ever. Oh, *home*.

If Mag and Jan were still at Kenneth Street, whatever she should decide to do would be done in an interval that would owe part of its secure endlessness to the state of mind brought about by the forgettable certainty of going to them in the afternoon, without going outside the surrounding presence of Central London. That was the change, the only change there would be, that Mag and Jan had gone away outside. And it was not essential. Perhaps it was good.

For those old Sundays with them were left

perfect, an everlasting possession. In spite of the curious occasional flaw : the way the girls agreed, amidst all their complete differences, in a half-mocking, *humorous* indulgence for all she tried to express to them. Intolerable, sometimes terrifying : the presence of a secret, magnanimous mockery, that included themselves, included everything and everybody and was sustained by a sort of taunting attitude towards life that was perfectly inexplicable. But on the whole those Sundays were perfection. Perfect at their time, so that often she and they, though Jan not so much, being older, and more lugubrious about the future and old age, had wished and said they wished, and without damaging the moment, that for ever they could go on living the lives they then were living.

Certain days stood warmly in her heart, gathering about them all the others that would need a special effort to call up, and all of one quality that amid innumerable variations had *never* varied : the three of them, their clearly-defined differences, origins, characters, beliefs, and a fourth, something that was there in the room and that depended upon their being together, and being together at the heart

of London and immensely at leisure, without past or future. So that anecdotes, stories of the past, and speculations as to what might lie ahead – happening only when, for some reason, one or other of them was not quite there, or was withdrawn into some private preoccupation – drove it away.

Some of these Sundays, some of the best, had been bought at shameful prices : lies that had yet brought no punishment, but the reward of increased eagerness on the part of the friends she had ruthlessly failed at the last moment.

One stood out from the rest with the guiltiest prelude : the going to look in on them on that grilling August Saturday, leaving her bag ready packed for the long-promised week-end with the Pernes at Banbury Park that had been an enchanting prospect ever since the arrival of Miss Deborah's unexpected affectionate letter breaking the years of silence since Miss Haddie's death. And all the more charming because Miss Haddie would not be there deliberately representing Church Christianity and doing her reproachful best so openly to be a good influence and failing because of her sad, soured immaturity, her *fear*, and cold dark jealousy. Only sunny Miss Deborah and

frivolous Miss Jenny and Wordsworth House empty of North-London girls. And Miss Haddie's death far enough away for them to be their gay, profane little off-duty selves : little Christian gentlewomen of the last century, mighty without knowing it, and heavenly company.

And as the visit approached, it had become not only their charming idea but also escape for two nights from the stifling attic, and all through the morning languor after a sleepless night she had had before her eyes their cool suburban sitting-room, its open windows letting in the jingle-jingle, plock-plock, of the soulless North-London trams that would sound, as she sat with them about the little tea-table and its old silver and fragile porcelain, the Gobelin screen somewhere near, and listened to their delicate chirrupings and chucklings, somehow less incongruous than on that first afternoon so many years ago.

It was midday. The girls both just back from their respective offices, blissful, amidst the disorder of settling down for the week-end. Jan cooking, in a crape dressing-gown, her head contradicting her body, boyishly intellectual with its short sculptured hair. Mag in

knickers and camisole, her west-country, Celtic hair a cloud about her face and neck, cleaning all her shoes set in a row. Chanting voices that did not cease when she came in. And both faces flushed and perspiring in the fearful London heat and the extra heat, the savoury heat of their cooking. And a sudden home-sickness for them and for their sweltering little rooms seeming, at that moment, more attractive, and, because of the deep release they brought to her spirit, *cooler*, than any garden could be. There seemed a special importance, that had grown stronger, turned into something that could not be missed, when Mag began laying her spells :

" Trains, week-ends, what *are* they ? I *ask* you, *what* ? " Yet preoccupied, utterly, bliss-fully preoccupied. Wanting not so much that I should stay as that by not going away I should preserve a familiar pattern.

" Having shown yourself, you *can't* leave us. Jan ! Can she leave us ? *Est-ce qu'elle peut uns verlassen ?* "

" *Nein ! Bestimmt ! In Gottes Rath.*"

" *Ewigkeit, Amen.*" And then, the shoes finished, as she went busily from room to room so that her voice sounded from various

distances, its chanting carelessness proclaiming her indifference, but with such intoxicating *attractiveness*, because it revealed her soul's eye set upon her week-end, its succession of moments and events as they appeared, secretly, to her alone and sent their joy into her voice as she moved about in their setting, sharing it with Jan, who saw it with the eye of one born and bred in another country, always to some extent as foreign, as something she had achieved but that yet remained outside herself :

" We insist, child, on you, or your hat. Go, if you must. But your hat. Stays here. We will suspend it. By its velvet strings. To the mantelpiece. In front of the archdeacon. We will regard " – and here she had stood near at hand, exultantly radiating her charm, through warm west-country eyes and smiling lips, and her easily-flowing affection, so sunny, having for its nearest objects her army of sisters and brothers, all safely at a distance and yet securely to be met on holidays she could, without discomfort, just manage to afford ; and the half-critical indulgence that was beginning to be her settled attitude, in agreement with Jan, some kind of formula that fitted their scheme of things – " its transparent, silky crinoline.

Its roses. With their help. And *torrents* of trrr-anspiration. We'll enduah."

Jan, having come in from the kitchen to stand at her side, with her so different, German smile, blondly radiant, denied by the little twist of her closely-held lips expressing her bitter comment on life, held always in reserve and implacable :

"*I.* Shall *wear* the hat."

And they had stood like a tribunal. And reluctantly, taking leave not so much of them personally as of the condensation of their common London life in all its retrospects and perspectives, specially, it seemed at that moment, represented by this torrid week-end she might have shared with them, she had privately decided, while mentally they left her and again took possession of their goods, the security of their isolation together for the immense interval between one week's work and another, that she must hold to her going. But in moving out to the landing and the sight of the descending stairs, the banishment from this innermost depth of the rich deeps of London seemed not only unendurable, but foolish and needless. As if to go, however morally and stoically, was to commit an outrage she would

regret to the end of her days. Her thoughts, for a moment, had touched the waiting Pernes and brought a pang of guilt that was nothing beside the deep, everyday joy that poured back when Mag, coming from her room, said quietly, simply, with a touch of anxious pleading making her voice undulate :

"You're *not* going, Miriam ? *Don't* go."

"Of *course* I'm not going."

"She's not going, Jan." Mag had turned her head towards the kitchen without removing her gaze, but in her level tone was triumph and malicious amusement, tempting me to say it was not entirely on their account I was staying, and in her smile a delighted anticipation of Jan's horrified amazement. Jan had almost tiptoed out from the kitchen and murmured, when she arrived, with her crooked smile reduced to its least shadow :

"Not ? Really not ?" And their sense of the enormity had come from them in waves.

"No. I don't want to go away. I don't want to wander out into bleak black blank North London. You can't imagine, even on a tropical day, how *cold* it is." She had carried their thoughts away, driven them away, from the personal aspects, made them enthusiastically

see the necessity, and it was Jan who suggested the telegram. And there was an interval, before it was sent, everyone separate again, and chanting, and blissful. And over that afternoon and evening had lain the deepest spell they had known together, for her and for Mag at any rate, and their happiness and the presence of the exaggerated weather had distracted Jan, insulated her for a while somewhere quite near the unchanging present.

The twilight had come to them all, coming home from Slater's, a shared, oh, surely that must have been a fully shared event and marvel; immense summer twilight, heavenly refreshment, sky swept clear of its blaze of light and heat, grown high and visible and kind ; buildings and people larger and more kindly than by day. Such an immense turning of day, personal, making to everybody a vast communication, deepening into dusk as we walked abreast, three little figures with dusk-white faces and dusk-dark garments, causelessly exulting, towards the morning which came at once, for I slept a rich sweet sleep that paid no heed to the sultry oven atmosphere of my room.

And that Sunday morning for the first time

I went round to them before breakfast out into the early summer morning, into all my summer mornings right back to that morning when I first saw a shadow lying on the *wrong side* of a gable. Across the silent early freshness of the square, feeling the remains of night and dawn in the deep scent and colour of its leaves, drinking its strange rich lonely air that seemed in the heart of London to come from a paradise as deep as any to be found in distant country lanes and woods. It sent a breath of its pure freshness down the little asleep brown street and on to their doorstep, till I forgot it and thought only of them and in a moment, having found them and yesterday still going on and holding us together, I was out again ; and now, the longest part of that day that seems so vast a stretch is the moment of being out again on those steps, going down them, with all the oncoming hours in my heart and their little milk-jug in my hand for ever ; for the whole of that summer that seemed then to approach from earth and sky and, as if it were a conscious being, to greet me coming down the steps in my rose-hat with loosely-tied strings, and, as I paused in delight, to claim me as part of its pageant ; so that in that moment my sense of

summer was perfect and I knew it was what I had stayed in London to meet.

The saliva-tube ceased its busy gurgling. Gave out its little click of glass on glass as Mr. Hancock bent across and hitched it over the rim of the spittoon. "Now rinse, please." He was at the far side of the chair filling the tumbler as the patient came upright mopping his lips, returning to his cold world and his cold use of its words. An emotional groan, facetious tribute to his gagged endurance ; a reflective sniff : prelude to speech ; but already Mr. Hancock, appointment-book in hand, had begun the dismissal. In a moment she would be alone with him in that world of silent or speechful communion that was so powerful still to set her other worlds at a distance. His least word, and Mr. Threele had left his thoughts flowing and himself conversational, would evoke the whole of it and break the current of her thoughts.

The speaking-tube clicked, and he came quickly back from his leave-taking across the room to answer it and would perhaps have the next patient sent up at once . . . ?

"Yes ?" he enquired, abstractedly listening into the tube and, in reply to the answer, yes,

again, informatively. It was not the patient ; a partner with a question, perhaps wanting him for a consultation, or one of the mechanics needing instructions or wanting him in the workshop. The second question was lighting his face with the glimmer of a smile, and she slowed her gathering-up of instruments to make a silence for talk that might last long enough to see the bracket cleared and herself escaped until the patient should be in the chair.

" Thank you." He turned to face her with his full, delighted beam : " Lord Wilderham to see you," he said and paused for a moment, enjoying his rôle, and moved away to his writing-table with a deliberate air of abdication and withdrawal, enjoying the little comedy.

She had smiled her response to it while their eyes had met and she had taken the unexpected Lord Wilderham and his unknown needs under her wing, and was free now to go off at once for her excursion into the far-off world represented by his name. So far-off and unrelated to her own and yet so deeply loved for its floods of golden light, the various rich beauty of its backgrounds and the fresh deeps of high surrounding air that blessed its innocent

inhabitants unnoticed, that she seemed to hold a place in it by natural right, and to touch it for a moment just now was an extension rather than a disturbance of her blissful state. She went down to the waiting-room feeling her spirit's joy the fuller for her errand, flowing more freely through her limbs and to the tips of her toes that scarcely felt the ground beneath them as they skimmed along the hall.

Lord Wilderham rose from a chair in the window-space beyond the table where held-up patients sat trying to read. In a moment she was at his side and as sharply aware, while they exchanged greetings, of his agitation and distress as if they had been her own, and stood poised, accepting and receiving and longing to remove them, glad to radiate the deep peace that to-day was so fully at her command ; till the pleasant, woeful, bloodshot blue eyes moved from hers to glance towards the room's silent occupants.

The opening of the door, upon a released patient greeting, and immediately greeted by, someone risen from the table, made quiet for them in the retreat where they were sharing his eloquent misery.

Through his staccato incoherencies – as he

stood shamed and suppliant, and sociable down to the very movement of his eyelashes, and looking so much as if he had come straight from a racecourse that her mind's eye saw the diagonal from shoulder to hip of the strap of his binoculars and upon his head the grey topper that would complete his dress and the gay rose in his buttonhole – she saw his pleasant life, saw its coming weeks, the best and brightest of the spring season, broken up by appointments to sit every few days for an indefinite time enduring discomfort and sometimes acute pain and facing the intimate reminder that the body doesn't last, facing and feeling the certainty of death.

This man would risk his life in the hunting-field, in wild and lonely distant parts of the earth, but the slow elaborate torments of modern dental surgery had broken his spirit. But not his courtesy. Half of his distress was over the enormity of breaking appointments. His decision to endure for the present no more root-dressings and preparations for crowns, no more long, long, tap-tap-tapping in of gold fillings, was desperate and bought at the price of genuine moral discomfort.

"What *are* we to say to Hancock?"

She sent him away reassured, with all his appointments safely cancelled and perfect understanding and forgiveness faithfully promised ; but as through the open front door she saw him spring into his jaunty, holland-blinded private hansom – and in spirit felt his relief as it bowled gaily off down the street through the spring sunlight towards the world of flowered balconies and high grey houses beautiful within : all at their best moment, the spring flowers in house-rooms and club-rooms giving out, with their scents, the essence in advance of the weeks to come right down to Ascot and Goodwood and Cowes, seen in perspective by all the genuinely participant *habitués*, and of these he certainly was one, as a single continuous collaborated jollification, the annual festival, centring in London and London's summer robbed by wealth of its discomforts, of the entire Oberland house-party – he was no longer just one of the social elect, but also a pathetic fugitive. Behind the merrily jingling hansom ran the shadow of death. Easily forgotten in the midst of the secure profane gaiety of wealthy social life where it is possible even for weaklings and the timid to lose and identify themselves with the

group and draw from it daily a dose of vicarious strength ; but always there.

He had fled from cessation, and the sense, brought by those moments in the chair when publicly, in one's own hearing and that of another, one's hardest tissues, mysteriously stricken, are ground away, of bodily failure and ultimate dissolution. From the witnessed, audible destruction that brings it so closely home. Neglected teeth may be uncomfortable, sometimes agonising. But they are a personal secret, easily forgotten in the long intervals.

Everybody, nearly every single person in the Western world, except some of the middle European rye-bread-eating peasantries, ravaged to some extent by dental caries. And still doctors scarcely ever looked at patients' mouths. And even dentists seemed to feel that all would be well if only the public and the medical profession could be awakened to the necessity for wholesale, regular dental treatment for everybody . . . school clinics. Enlightened practical commonsense people, hygienists and public health enthusiasts, pioneers, talking glibly and calmly about the great future, once they were set going, of school dental clinics,

never hearing in the very word the cold metallic click of instruments, never imagining the second-rate men who would accept these poorly-paid jobs and handle the scared children. And even if they were all the equals of Mr. Hancock and everybody were skilfully and gently treated. What then ? It would make no difference to the truth : death attacking Western civilisation by the teeth.

Civilisation, she told herself going slowly upstairs, and the helpless, wild, unconscious shriek of a patient coming round from nitrous-oxide in a downstairs surgery seemed to her the voice of the Western world in its death-throes, depends upon the stability of molars. No longer stable. That is why dentistry, the despised and rejected amongst the healing arts, is a revelation where medicine is a blind. Medicine chases symptoms, checks one disease and sees another increase. Total result : nil. Dental surgery treats symptoms that remain in place and do not change their form. Is therefore in a position to recognise that treatment *does not cure*. Civilisation. Disease. And treatment growing all the time more and more elaborate. Nightmare : increasing armies of doctors trained, and in honour bound, even if

they themselves, to say nothing of the helplessly onlooking relatives, are revolted by the processes, to "keep life going to the last possible moment by every available means," and the fearful array, for ever increasing, of drugs and appliances that can drag the dying back to consciousness and torment.

The ancient crack, where London grime had collected, in the jamb of the glass door of her room confirmed her gloomy reflections and challenged the skylit brightness upon which the door opened. But in vain, in vain. The sweet fresh air from the opposite open door flowed into her nostrils. Her being went forth to meet it. Here, within the air, far within this breath of life with the sun on its spring moisture, was rescue from all the gloom in the world. Flight, like Lord Wilderham's? He to his daily Oberland, she to her morning air? No. There was an answer, a personal answer and assurance somewhere within the deeps of this living air: not all the black evidence of human history could prevail against it. In light and darkness it was there. It was a touch. It conveyed the touch of a living, conscious being.

The silent light, sharply signalling amongst

the mountains, had been a message ; but this low, sweet English air was an embrace.

The coming end of to-day's morning tapped stealthily on her mind and began to spread its influence. Just enough time in hand for all that remained to be done. With a deep sigh that brought to her eyes a smile of salutation, she sat down at her table and gathered together the scattered letters and cheques and felt time at once resume its deep, morning quality, and turned to greet Hawkins come quietly in from the basement workshop for the mechanics' wages with the morning in his eyes. The sunlight would now be striking in through the barred basement skylight. Above the horrid gold coins they met in silent agreement and exchanged their differently worded tributes and parted with the cunning smiles of conspirators enriching their secret by leaving it unspoken.

A glance at her clock showed its hands met on noon and, propped against its side, a letter come by the mid-morning post and placed carefully there, clear of the table's litter, by Eve, addressed to herself. In a strange hand. Queer staccato pen-strokes, sloping at various angles, with disjointed curves set between : *Amabel.*

A mass of small sheets, covered, without margins. Strange pattern of curves and straight strokes rapidly set down. Each separately. Gaps not only between each letter but also between the straight and the curved part of a single letter. Letters and words to be put together by the eye as it went along.

She reckoned the cost of reading the whole : the sacrifice of part of a Saturday afternoon to work that after this invasion of her unprepared consciousness might go at a dragging pace. Glancing through the pages she found some, in a larger and still more hurried hand, where no single word showed its meaning directly. Between each letter of each word was as much space as between the words they were supposed to compose. Yet each was expressive, before its meaning appeared. Each letter, carelessly dashed down, under pressure of feeling, was a picture, framed in the surrounding space.

When meanings were discovered, they sounded ; as if spoken.

It was this strange, direct, as if spoken communication, punctuated only by dashes sloped at various angles like the sharp, forcible uprights of the script and seeming to be the pauses of a voice in speech, that was making the reading

of this letter so new an experience. From its enchantment part of her mind was still held aloof by its strangeness, enquiring, considering. Her eye, not yet accustomed, kept pausing over the expressiveness of the new words attaching themselves to those already read, moving as well as sounding while they came, set together by her eye, to their proper meaning.

Alive. These written words were alive in a way no others she had met had been alive. Instead of calling her attention to the way the pen was held, to the many expressivenesses of a given handwriting apart from what it was being used to express, instead of bringing as did the majority of letters, especially those written by men, a picture of the writer seated and thoughtfully using a medium of communication, recognising its limitations and remaining docile within them so that the letter itself seemed quite as much to express the impossibility as the possibility of exchange by means of the written word, it called her directly to the girl herself, making her, and not the letter, the medium of expression. Each word, each letter, was Amabel, was one of the many poses of her body, upright as a plant is upright,

elegant as a decorative plant, supporting its embellishing curves just as the clean uprights of the letters supported the curves that belonged to them.

And these word-making letters so swiftly flung on to the marginless page, substituting their individual shape for the letter-shape that she now realised had a limiting effect upon what was expressed therein, were seeming to explain and justify the poses : to show them for so long already habitual in this girl's young life that although they pleased her and were to her the movements of a dance, they expressed her without hindrance. She admired as she took them, called attention to them. Impersonally, as she called herself by name.

" Isn't – E-g-y-p-t – a beautiful word ? "

Beautiful ? If it were, she was tried in the balance and found wanting. Amabel stood turned away from her posed in contemplation of something she could not see, so that for her own contemplation only the pose remained.

French. The Frenchwoman, judging, selecting for approval and, by her pose, holding both herself and anyone contemplating her in reverence before what she perceived : person, thing, idea. According to some standard that

for her was infallible, Amabel collected, as she went along through life.

But this letter, moving breathlessly, staccato, was more English than French. Without her spoken accent, now that she was turned away and her voice no longer heard, it was English altogether.

Egypt. Neither the sound nor the sight of the word was lovely. Written, with its three differently tailed letters properly joined, it was unmanageable : the tails competed. In the whole written language surely no word was more difficult to beautify. The opening sound uglier even than " cheese," the pouting spit of the conclusion : hopeless.

Yet she singled it out, pausing before it, offering it. Mystery.

Returning from scribbling in various styles of handwriting the difficult combination, she gazed once more at the word on the page and saw that as written by the girl it was not a word at all. It was a picture, a hieroglyph, each letter lovely in itself. Beautiful, yes, and suggesting all its associations more powerfully than did the sight of the word written closely.

Written as she wrote it, it was expressive exactly as her script was expressive : a balance

of angles and curves. Like the words traced on the mirror. It was their expression, which was Amabel's, as much as what they had said, that had so moved her.

"Forgive – I watched you – in your little English clothes – go across the square – oh, my lady – my little – you terrified my heart – I hold it out to you – my terrified heart – in my two hands——"

Real. Reality vibrating behind this effort to drive feeling through words. The girl's reality appealing to her own, seeing and feeling it ahead of her own seeings or feelings that yet responded, acknowledged as she emerged from her reading, in herself and the girl, with them when they were together, somehow between them in the mysterious interplay of their two beings, the reality she had known for so long alone, brought out into life.

The phrase scrawled beneath the signature gradually grew clear: "I wrote, with your *soap*!"

Alarmed by this almost terrifying resourcefulness, Miriam put the letter aside and turned to her work.

To-morrow morning, if I happen to wake . . .

But now to-morrow morning and all the

visible circumstances of her life had retreated to inaccessible distance, leaving her isolated with this girl.

Suddenly, punctually isolated, as once she had been with Eleanor, and, again this time, just as everything about her had become a continuous blossoming.

AGAIN the side-door of a small restaurant in a narrow street. Again a dingy waiter leading the way up an ill-lit staircase. Again the conflict between her desire to be a sympathetic presence and her resentment of his ignorance of her perfect awareness of the conflict in him, between his bourgeois scruples and his secret, newcomer's delight in what he had called his "slum." Again a distracting preoccupation with the world-wide vision of harpy disreputability offering facilities to the well-to-do. And again, more clearly than all, her whole being set against the plan that last week had perfectly foiled itself without instructing him. . . .

Coercion. The unpardonable crime.

Unless he should realise that, and make a convincing recantation, he would wreck this occasion as he had wrecked all the others.

It was his worst fault ?

The thought occurred to her, coming as if from outside her mind and gleaming for an instant in the murky darkness, that presently she might discreetly discuss this subject with him. He might listen in the way he sometimes had done when suddenly and irrelevantly she said something with all the force of her nature. And this particular certainty was perhaps her strongest social certainty.

Philosophising : Well, it was what she most wanted, to begin with : to remove a barrier of which he was aware without understanding its nature. It would be difficult, almost impossible, in a half-lit, shame-faced room. Perhaps the same room. Whose features, in memory, had already attained a kind of beauty.

But to-night the journey ended in a brightly-lit sitting-room with table laid. And instantly the evening was endless. They were alone, in endless time.

Piling her outdoor things upon a sheeny shame-faced armchair in a dark corner near a window through the slats of whose dilapidated

venetian blinds came the bluish light of a street-lamp, she felt the remains of the day's preoccupations fall away and strength return, flowing in from the promise of leisure, making her hope she was less tired than she felt. Far away from him and from her surroundings her spirit seemed to flee, demanding peace, and to-night, at no matter what cost in apparent idiocy or ill-humour, she *would* reach that central peace ; go farther and farther into the heart of her being and be there, as if alone, tranquilly, until fully possessed by that something within her that was more than herself. If not, if she remained outside it, if he succeeded in making her pretend, though he never knew she was pretending, to be an inhabitant of his world, then again they would squabble and part.

As they both came forward into the central light and he rounded off the tuneless humming that had accompanied his disrobing and had been meant to signal self-possession, with a cheerful cadenza on a tone increased in fullness like that of an opera orchestra while the hero enters, and still said no word, she felt time and space open out between them, infinitely available : the gift of last week's evening,

of their first evening of being alone and inaccessible.

And paused in deep gratitude to life and to him, just short of the lit table, and turned away to the mirror with her hands to her hair as though arranging it. Immediately his humming broke forth anew ; this time to answer her silent abstraction, to tell her they were *both* tranquilly at home and at leisure.

Gazing into the depths of the mirror's fly-blown damp-mottled reflection of a dark curtain screening a door in the opposite wall, she was aware of herself there in the picture, lit from behind, obstructing the light that presently again would lie across the mirror when she turned to join the party : him, and herself representing to him a set of memories amongst other sets of memories. A set covering about ten years of his life, covering the period that had seen him emerge from obscurity to celebrity in his world that was so alien to her own.

In and out of every year of his ascent her life had been woven. She had been a witness, and was now a kind of compendium for him of it all, one of his supports, one of those who through having known the beginnings, through representing them every time she appeared,

brought to him a realisation of his achievements.

He was two people. A man achieving, becoming, driving forward to unpredictable becomings, delighting in the process, devoting himself, compelling himself, whom so frankly he criticised and so genuinely deplored, to a ceaseless becoming, ceaseless assimilating of anything that promised to serve the interests of a ceaseless becoming for life as he saw it. And also a man seeming uncreated, without any existence worth the name.

If presently he should ask, really wishing, impersonally, to hear of movements, of any kind of accomplishment : " Well, what have you been up to since last week ? " And she should answer, as a hundred times she had answered : " Living," he would emit the little chuckle, half amusement at what he considered an evasion and half disapproval of the spectacle of a life spent, as lately he had so often said, " in agreeable loafing that leads nowhere."

But then he would say also, in moods of reflective impersonal contemplation : " You've taken your freedom, Miriam, won it in the teeth of difficulties in a way that compels my admiration. You've lived, you still live, you know, only just above the poverty line, and it

hasn't bashed you." And so many other descriptive commentaries, recognisable, impersonal classifications of all sorts. And yet she remained, felt, unknown to him. And whatever selves he might reveal to her, selves he hinted at, none of which she had any desire to become, she must remain unknown. For so dismally, in everyone, he saw only what they were becoming or might become, and of the essential individual knew, and wanted to know, nothing at all.

The dreary young waiter came in with the soup and once more the room asserted its character and Hypo, sharply aware of him, began at once to edit his ideas of the occasion by his manner of supervising his arrangements with a half-friendly, half-patronising approval, and succeeded only in making the mournful young man strain yet higher the eyebrows permanently a little lifted by the disappointing difference between the realities of his life in London and his dreams thereof in his far-away continental home.

He shuffled away and the room recovered : the fly-blown mirror, the faded artificial flowers, the obtrusive sofa, were redeemed by the table's circle of golden light, now populous

and become one with all the circles of golden light within which she had sat down to feast.

Taking her place, she felt more than the usual familiar sense of everlastingness that came forward in her at the moment of sitting down to table with beloved people, and stayed until the breaking forth of conversation drove it into the background. Here it was, blissfully beating its wings in the disgraceful room and coming this time not only from the past but from past and future alike ; for ever.

She held to it, savouring its strange new quality, its power of so intensifying the radiance in which they sat, that everything beyond it was a darkness obliterating the walls of the room, extending back and back, right along the receding years of their intermittent friendship.

Called by his unusual silence to glance across the separating inches, she saw that he was being grave, apparently quietly abstracted. Honestly, quite honestly and sincerely he was playing up to her, venturing unarmed into the desert shared life became for him whenever deliberate, incessant gaiety was in abeyance whose destructive power he yet knew as well as he knew its joys.

Robbed of the subtle curves drawn about

them by his watchful readiness for witty improvisation or facetious retort, robbed of the authoritative complacency they wore during his ceaseless social occupation of definition and commentary at every turn of every occasion, his features were homely, reverted to his very homely type, the raw material of his personal appearance. Only his brow, the side of it left free from limply forward-falling wisps of hair, asserted independence, above his momentarily invisible eyes ; thought-moulded, moulded by the theories and thoughts that built up his mental life.

She was at once charmed and touched by this surely painful experiment, the result of his willingness to try to meet her on her own ground, or at any rate her own terms ; for the ground she lived on he believed to be merely a mistaken self-importance.

Turning away her eyes from the strange spectacle of him abdicated and docile, she became aware of the thoughts behind his experiment. He was curious as to what use she would make of the offered leadership, and at the same time sceptical, willing to give her time at any rate time enough to prove to herself as well as to him that her silence was

what he believed all feminine silence to be : a vacuous waiting.

His patience, unless she could almost hypnotise him by the intensity of her concentration, would give out. Long before she could attain. Well, let it give out.

Scarcely breathing, she dropped, aware at once by the way the now familiar objects of the room fused to a unity, as if seen from a distance, that she would remember them for ever, down and down, sure now, if she could hold out, of attaining at last in his presence for the first time, save now and again by accident, to possession of that self within herself who was more than her momentary self, and again and again, intermittently and unreliably, had charmed them both.

Almost arrived, almost down in the innermost sphere of happy solitude she was drawing the first deep breath of its fresher air that was like air coming across the sea at night, air breathed above the waters of a bubbling spring, she was halted by the watchfulness of a swift glance, a ray immediately withdrawn.

In answer to her awareness, having first made sure of it, made sure her eyes would turn his way, he raised his spoon and flourished it in a

neat little spiral above his plate, with eyes downcast, lips pouched, and eyebrows pathetically up in would-be childish appeal : a small pantomime suggesting that they should get on with their soup.

He was confessing his vow of silence, making game of it, revealing above his half-mocking, half-interested, sceptical submissiveness, his ceaseless mind presiding, its wide shallow definitions and interpretations all neatly in place.

With a flash of insight that freed her for ever, she felt, of jealousy of his relationships past, present and future, she saw how very slight, how restricted and perpetually baffled must always be the communication between him and anything that bore the name of woman. Saw the price each one had paid with whom he had been intimate either in love or friendship, in being obliged to shut off, in order to meet him in his world, his shaped world, rationalised according to whatever scheme of thought was appealing to him at the moment, three-fourths of their being.

What could any one of them be for him beyond the fact that they were providers of what he regarded as vitalising physical contacts,

but sounding-boards for his ideas ; admirers, supporters ? Either they were disciples, holding on to and living in the light of one or other of the mutually contradictory interpretations of life perpetually evolved by men, all of them right and all wrong, and were therefore not women at all, but the " intelligent emancipated creatures " for whom he expressed so much admiration while fighting shy of them in his leisure hours because of their awful consistency and conscientiousness or because, as Jan said, " a rush of brains to the head usually made them rather plain in the face," or they played up whenever they were with him, trotted briskly about on his maps and diagrams and lived for the rest of their time in their own deep world.

All this she felt to-night with the strength of two. Amabel was with her, young Amabel, with her mature experience of men, who had confirmed what hitherto she had thought might be inexperience, or a personal peculiarity : her certainty that between men and women there can be no direct communication.

There was no place in his universe for women who did not either sincerely, blindly, follow, or play up and make him believe they were following. All the others were merely pleasant or

unpleasant biological material. Those who opposed : misguided creatures who must not be allowed to obstruct. The majority played up : for the sake of his society, his charm, the charm of enjoying and watching him enjoy the pranks of his lightning-swift intelligence. The temptation was great.

She knew she had not always resisted it.

Poor little man. Isolated without knowing the cause of his isolation. Representing, as he sat there, all his isolated fellow-men.

No, there was no room for jealousy of the association of any woman with any man ; only perhaps of their privileges and some of their experiences.

People can meet only in God ? The shape, she took her spoon and began on her soup, swiftly, rhythmically, seeing upon the table-cloth in front of her the shape : a triangle. Woman and man at either end of the base, the apex : God.

" Grace," she said, feeling now quite free, as if in solitude, to entertain herself with her own thoughts. " That is why people say Grace. At least, one of the reasons."

" Grace . . ." he began, provisionally, in the rather high-pitched tone that meant he was

focusing something for which he had no prepared formula ; but very gently so that he might, if she wished, be considered not to have spoken.

"Grace," she breathed, as if speaking to herself : "Grace, even if followed by *Snooks* . . . anyone bearing such a name, called by it every day, must be influenced."

With "Gracie" and "Grice" sounding hideously in her ears as she reflected that the name, as spoken in English, was a bad example of what she might have wanted to express if her new interest in words as a factor in environ- had really been brought into play, she felt his eyes turn upon her and away again as he bent, believing her engrossed, to his filled spoon, without attempting to interpose, by means of some characteristic sally, his bugle-call to some recognisable form of mental activity.

This was marvellous. As now and again in the past, but then only in the midst of distracting conflict, she felt her spirit expand freely in the room and gather to itself, in the immensity of leisure provided by each succeeding second, all that belonged to the occasion.

So prominent in the backward vista that it seemed now to be offering itself as a substitute

for the one now surrounding them, the scene of their early conflicts and of the beginning of the false-true relationship now established between them came clearly before her inward eye : the room shaped like a one-armed signpost, the long, cushioned seat in the window looking out to sea, every detail of the room's contents that had flouted her in moments of despair over the absence of words to frame the truths that balanced his and refused to fit into his patterns.

She felt again the delight of the moment of facing silently, alone with him, the sea's distant misty blue behind the nearer blue brilliance of delphiniums and saw again the window-framed loveliness deepen as quite gravely and simply he implored her to remain, for the whole morning dependably there, supporting. Again felt that morning immediately become endless. It did not matter that his consciousness had forgotten all this. Actually, it was the moment preceding this present one. Interruption had fallen upon it. Upon all the opportunities he had made, it had punctually fallen.

But now interruption was banished.

" This is very nice and domestic. You are having your first share of domesticity, Miretta."

She looked across the few inches of space that separated them as across a gulf on the hither side of which he sat awaiting response to his adroit attempt to steer her thoughts, and met his eyes and saw re-enthroned in them the comedic sprite that gave him ceaseless entertainment and would not let him live.

Having given her the chance of steering the conversation and waited, according to his own reckoning, for dark ages, in vain, he now resumed his usual rôle in any shared experience : conductor, perpetually defining.

It was true. This *was* perhaps her share of domestic life. Perhaps all she had felt on sitting down to table was the result of a plunge into that zone of experience, now irrevocable and to be bearing fruit for ever.

"Been flying, almost desperately, from domesticity, all m'life."

"Yes. . . . *Yes*. Lucky Miriam. Sailing free. You *are* lucky, you know. Not domesticity, then. Isolation ; in space. But that unfortunate young man'll be coming in again. Don't go too far into space before we've done with him."

"Women carry all the domesticity they

need about with them. That is why they can get along alone so much better than men."

That had launched him ; and to the now quite strange sound of his voice, as new and strange as it had been the first time she heard it, she comfortably went on thinking ; reminding herself of the many wives in whose eyes she had surprised private meditation going its way behind an appearance of close attention to a familiar voice.

Half turned towards his talk, eating her soup as though her listening supplied her present animation, she considered the strangeness, the perversity of his perpetual denial of the being far away within himself who believed all she wanted him to believe and knew all she wanted him to know. The one who had written the phrase of which his words had just reminded her.

No cunning, no kind of clever calculation could have worked the miracle of that letter. So complete that she had forgotten it, although without it she would not have been here tonight. But it was not until now that she saw it as proof of all he denied.

It was scientific evidence, surely more interesting and valuable, if less directly profitable,

than the kind of evidence by which he set such store, and to this, the fact that it was *scientific* evidence she held eagerly, the whole of her mind seeming to be vocal at once above the sounds made by the waiter returned and who now was a friend, one of the strange human family, being and knowing, behind all the surface appearances and comings and goings. Ignoring them both, she prepared to communicate, with all these voices that were speaking at once within her, each presenting a different aspect of what she wanted to say and leaving her to choose the one that would best secure his attention.

But when they were once more alone she felt careless, defiant of any careful presentation. To whatever she said he would give an attention that for this evening at least was centred on herself. The beating within her of what seemed at once life and light, was making her breath come unsteadily and her voice shook a little as she said :

" It was in the middle of the morning," and then steadied, for its sound, so personal and yet so strange, the thin small thread of sound, however smooth and pleasant and musical, going out into space to represent – in a manner

that left with every word so much denied and so little so partially stated – one person to another, was warning her that the evidence, if it were to convince, must be given in his language of " honest fact."

" There had been," she went on, looking straight ahead and filling out her tone to carry herself past any obstructive witticism of word or manner he might find necessary for the decoration of his retirement from discourse, " a letter from a friend by the first post. Various letters, of course, from various friends. But just that one letter standing out from the rest. It doesn't matter why it stood out. The reasons may be good, bad, indifferent, anything you like." His eyes moved from her face ; his thoughts, while the point of her discourse remained uncertain, had touched the subject's possibilities and his set of generalisations about it – including the one, a little hampering her discourse, about the feminine habit of writing long, personal letters that so easily degenerated into a pleasant waste of time – and, with these ready to hand, had dropped away.

" The point is that there could not possibly be another of these very special letters, which in any case always came by the first post, until

the next day. Came a rat-tat. I *do* dislike that form, don't you? *Came* this and that; even in poetry. Perhaps because came is such a poor sound. Won't bear the weight of suspense. . . . Now *kahm*——" Reverie advanced upon her, suggesting the interest to be found in considering the relative powers of English and German words. He cherished Saxon English for its sanguine force and rich earthiness, but did not know how continuously vivid was German, with its unaltered, ancient pictoriality, every other word describing an action or an object so as to bring it before the eyes; even the terminology of philosophy being directly descriptive.

"Proceed, Miriam."

"*Kahm*, then, the eleven o'clock rat-tat, which I hear every day unmoved and which, as I have explained, on this particular day could not be bringing me anything, brought me to my feet in a way that no other rat-tat has ever done in the whole of my life. With my heart beating, and telling me much more plainly than speech could do that there was, down there in the letter-box, only one letter, instead of the usual posse of business letters and circulars, and that it was for *me*."

" Yes. One has these curious premonitions, in certain moods. Certain states of heightened perception. One is exalted and luminous."

He knew then and accepted this kind of experience, had perhaps gone through it himself, and yet remained incurious. She could tell him no more. Even if he were different, believing in an unseen world and an unseen power in communication with every single soul, even if he could suddenly be turned into a believer and her own man and partner, she could not tell, in words, what had happened in the moment of reading. He was in the midst of truth, surrounded by it as she knew it to be, but not willing to attend to its intimations. So the sacred moment was apart in her own personal and private life, though it was he who had found the words to describe its cause.

" Art, sex and religion ; one and the same," she said briskly, " but that doesn't matter. What matters——"

" Tell me, was that letter from me ? Nice-Miriam ; *your* letters are exactly like yourself. Was it ? "

" That doesn't matter. The shock, coming from outside, inside, life-as-it-seems-to-be was

in having, as it were, read the letter before it came and reacted to it when my rational mind *knew* it couldn't be there."

And the letter was *not*, in a sense, from him.

"There's no outside that is not——"

"Yes. There *is*. We can move, see, hear, feel somehow beyond our immediate selves. We can. We do."

And now again the waiter came in, creating diversions with his presence and more food and again departed, leaving Hypo talking of discoveries that would supply scientific explanations for a set of phenomena not at present understood.

She smiled and stretched cool limbs full of strength that an hour ago were so fevered with weariness and, in the deep silence flowing in from the past over the sound of his words and all the words that ever would be used to convey thoughts about life, she demanded of herself whether she cared for him in the smallest degree or for anyone or anything so much as the certainty of being in communion with something always there, something in which and through which people could meet and whose absence, felt with people who did not acknowledge it,

made life at once impossible, made it a death worse than any dying.

"Religious people in general are in some way unsatisfactory. Not fully alive. Exclusive. Irreligious people are unsatisfactory in another way. Defiant."

A violin, squeaking and scraping in the street below, making his remark inaudible because it was taking all her attention. Its halting sounds, the uncertain notes scraped out into the air of the gloomy street, were addressing themselves to what was always waiting, just within reach, just beyond the always breaking, always disappearing fragments of every kind of life . . . *Eve's little aria*. Playing itself, appealingly, into her heart. Hearing it now, not in Eve's rendering, nor in that of the decrepit musician down there, but in its own perfection, which now she was realising for the first time, she was smitten by its meditative beauty and by the power with which it called her to herself. It was his enemy. It asserted, quietly, confidently, and, in coming to her at this moment out of the far past and showing it remaining in herself more deeply than the raw new years that had succeeded it and were still formless and void, as if gently

jesting with her while it overwhelmed her with its tenderness, all that he denied.

"Glück," she said, and reflected for the first time that the composer's name meant "happiness."

"Glook, dear Miriam," he said swiftly, and raised his glass.

And she remembered how years ago, when first hovering between relief and admiration for the mental freedom of the Wilson atmosphere, and uncertainty as to the liberties Hypo had taken with the shape of social life, she had told Eve, in a letter written from the Brooms' villa, from the midst of all the old beliefs, that she felt, in not renouncing the friendship of a divorced, remarried man, she was selling her soul to the devil. And how Eve had written imploring her to give him up.

And now she was surrounded by people all of whom Eve would see as "living in sin." And was about to join their ranks.

Raising her hand to keep him from further speech, she listened with all her strength and moved as she listened away and away, not back into the past, but forward, it seemed, into a future that belonged to it and drew her to itself, to where by nature she belonged.

Crashing across what now seemed to be Eve's own voice and brought a picture of her as she used to stand, gently waiting, without words, when her feelings had been hurt, came the sound of a heavy vehicle along the street.

"You *are* a dear, Miriam," he said in his most delighted voice. "I wish I had your power of complete enthusiasm at a moment's notice. You *do* enjoy life, you know."

"That is one of the loveliest little shapes of music, of its kind, there can be."

THERE ought to be homage. There was a woman, not this thinking self who talked with men in their own language, but one whose words could be spoken only from the heart's knowledge, waiting to be born in her.

Now here, really, was a point for him : men want recognition of their work, to help them to believe in themselves. They want limelight and approval, even if they are only hanging a picture, crookedly, in order to bring them confirmation of the worth of what they do. Unless in some form they get it, all but the very

few – the stoic philosophical ones who are apt to have a crooked smile, and a pipe in one corner of it, and not much of an opinion of humanity, but a sort of blasphemous, unconsciously destructive, blind, kindly *tolerance* – are miserable. Women, then, want recognition of themselves, of what they are and represent, before they can come fully to birth. Homage for what they are and represent.

He was incapable of homage. Or had given all he had and grown sceptical and dead about it. Left it somewhere. But without a touch of it she could not come fully to birth for him. In that sense all women *are* Undine. Only through a man's recognition can they come to their full stature. But so are men, in their different way. It was his constricted, biological way of seeing sex that kept him blind. Beauty, even, was to him beauty by contrast with Neanderthal man. . . .

"The trouble with Miretta is that one can't take liberties with a philosopher."

She smiled from far away, from where if only he knew and could have patience just to look at what she saw and fully submit himself to its truth, see and feel its truth, she could travel towards him. But at least this evening

he was serene, not annoyed both with himself and with her as in last week's dimly-lit room where yet in memory he seemed so much nearer to her than in this golden light. This evening he knew that the barrier was not of her own deliberate placing.

"Now with others than Miretta" – flattery – "one just takes them in one's arms and immediately there is no barrier."

"Not because I am different. Because there is a psychological barrier. We've not talked enough."

"Talking comes afterwards, believe me."

He dropped a kiss on her shoulder.

"You *are* a pretty creature, Miriam. I wish you could see yourself."

With the eyes of Amabel and with her own eyes opened by Amabel she saw the long honey-coloured ropes of hair framing the face that Amabel found beautiful in its "Flemish Madonna" type, falling across her shoulders and along her body where the last foot of their length, red-gold, gleamed marvellously against the rose-tinted velvety gleaming of her flesh. Saw the lines and curves of her limbs, their balance and harmony. Impersonally beautiful and inspiring. To him each detail was

" pretty," and the whole an object of desire.

With an impersonal sacredness they appeared before her, less imaginable as objects of desire than when swathed, as in public they had been all her life.

This mutual nakedness was appeasing rather than stimulating. And austere, as if it were a first step in some arduous discipline.

His body was not beautiful. She could find nothing to adore, no ground for response to his lightly-spoken tribute. The manly structure, the smooth, satiny sheen in place of her own velvety glow was interesting as partner and foil, but not desirable. It had no power to stir her as often she had been stirred by the sudden sight of him walking down a garden or entering a room. With the familiar clothes, something of his essential self seemed to have departed.

Leaving him pathetic.

The impulse seemed reckless. But when she had leaned forward and clasped him, the warm contact drove away the idea that she might be both humiliating and annoying him and brought a flood of solicitude and suggested a strange action. And as gently she rocked him to and fro the words that came to her lips were

so unsuitable that even while she murmured "My little babe, just born," she blushed for them and steeled herself for his comment.

Letting him go, she found his arms about her in their turn and herself, surprised and not able with sufficient swiftness to contract her expanded being that still seemed to encompass him, rocked unsatisfactorily to and fro while his voice, low and shy and with the inappropriate unwelcome charm in it of the ineffectual gestures of a child learning a game, echoed the unsuitable words.

She leaned back surveying him with downcast eyes, dismayed to feel in him the single, simple, lonely helplessness of the human soul from which his certainties, though they seemed blind, had made her imagine him exempt, and wanting now only to restore him as swiftly as possible to his own world, even at the price of pretending she believed in it. With this determination came a sudden easy certainty of being able to rescue his evening from any sense of failure and disappointment.

Looking up at him with a plan in her mind that in his present state of simplicity did not seem impossible, she met his voice :

"Lost lady. Your reputation's in shreds, Miriam, virginal though you be."

"Yes. Come and have coffee at my Donnizetti's. Open till midnight. One of those little Italian-Swiss places where everything is fried in the same fat."

She had risked the chances of the suggestion by apologising for it. With an ingenious piece of flattery he would bring the occasion to an end and get away to his own world, with a formula for his evening that would satisfy every test he was likely to apply to it.

"We'll have a hansom," he said, making for his piled clothes, with the little creak in his voice that was only there when he was on the way to something that promised entertainment. "A hansom," he repeated with comforting ineptitude, "evade the east wind."

Reflected in the mirror she saw as if it were elsewhere and invisible, save by an effort of imagination she did not wish to make, the spectacle of him in conflict with garments and drew her eyes back to her own image just in time to see before it was shadowed by the influence of the haste that was needed if she were to be ready in time to escape the embarrassment of his misguided observation, how radiant it

was in the promise of side-by-side companionship.

"We always have an east wind. It's a portent."

"We'll elude it. I deplore your superstitions, Miriam, and adore your shamelessness in adhering to them. If I don't look out I shall end by adoring the superstitions."

AS they took their places in a vacant corner, without losing any of the joy that had possessed her when the absurd plan suggested itself, she saw the miserable little interior through his eyes. And the sight of his face wearing the curves it had only when everything was going very well, made her carelessly happy and sent her mind on a private tour all round the well-known space, reviving the memories stored up in it. Her early solitude. Eleanor, blissful here in brief immeasurable intervals between difficulty and difficulty. Michael, in conflict and in truce. Selina, courteously enduring a unique experience, restraining her withering disapproval until the moment before they left.

She lost without regret the meaning of the words coming from his side of the table and was prevented from turning to enquire by the sight of little Donnizetti bringing his plump, short person as quickly as possible down the narrow gangway, turning sideways where projecting chairs impeded his advance, with china-blue eyes coldly inspecting Hypo from a distance and remaining keen and stern when he arrived and turned them upon herself, and only sending forth the kindly ray of the smile that smoothed away the lines drawn by disapproval on his well-padded brow when she gave her order, in a voice expressing for him and for herself so much more than her delight in this single occasion that when she turned back to Hypo she knew that already he must have come into possession of some of the wealth accumulated here.

But though for the moment he was incredibly sitting at ease and happy here in her world and her life, he would presently need distractions. Forcing herself to ignore the fact that she had on her hands a man accustomed to be "animated" and to meet "animation," she at once recovered the depth of her surroundings, from which she found herself glancing at the picture

that was the result of trying on Amable the effect of her own belief in the impossibility of association between men and women : Amabel at breakfast with Basil in his shooting-box, sitting there in morning light, lovely in her blue kimono, fresh and amusing and delightful and apparently amused and delighted, and Basil, opposite, believing that the behaviour and the talk with which she was filling the gap, to him the enchanting behaviour and the delightful talk and laughter of an amazingly intelligent child-woman, was spontaneous and as pleasing to herself as to him ; having no idea of the difficulty, the sheer hard work of holding herself in his world and keeping him at his ease even for an hour.

She stole yet another flash of time to contemplate the alternatives that would confront her in looking across at him as if about to speak : " pally " conversational remarks, the small-talk, in their own coinage, for men only, of the woman who has abdicated, fancies she has become a friend and not only is but looks a satellite ; the sprightly, amusing, half-cynical, social-revelation kind of talk, adapted to male blindness in social life and vastly entertaining them in their unoccupied moments, and giving

women the reputation for scandal-mongering from which most men were free only by reason of their social blindness and incapacity ; the man-to-man, generalised talk that must go forward in a language each of whose terms leaps a gap and goes confidently forward and finally leaves both them and the women who contrive without reservations to adopt their mentality and their methods, in a desert of agnosticism.

In conning over his experience of these varieties of interchange, she grew self-conscious, aware of having slipped too far away, and sadly anticipated that in the second about to follow the one that was flashing by, he would, assuming the blankness of her mind, be amiably embarking upon one of his entertaining, life-darkening improvisations.

" The *padrone*," she said drily, despairingly, " is always suspicious of my men friends," and looked up. He was preparing for nothing. For several seconds he had sat contented, apparently thoughtless. With a face a little fuller than when they had come in, he looked at her encouragingly.

" He slew Michael one night with a look. I had been here alone, writing a letter in pencil, and Donnizetti most charmingly brought me

a stamp. When Michael came in I told him about the stamp and, horribly, when we were paying our bill, he growled, 'And thee *stahmp* ?' Donnizetti, the Swiss part of him, grew scarlet and the Italian part sent a stiletto through Michael's heart, but I had gasped 'Oh, *no*,' just in time and he turned his back on Michael and smiled his dimpled smile and took leave. He escorts me to tables and to the door in the most courtly fashion. And never talks. That is the comfort of him. I've never heard him speak. Except to give orders down the lift, in Italian."

While she went on to tell him the story of her first breaking in at Donnizetti's, swiftly because other communications were crowding that would interest him, being impersonal, less and more than this one she was being able to tell so vividly because she had never told it before and felt now so full of life, he listened without any of his usual critical detachment.

" You've got to switch over into journalism, Miriam. You're wasting yourself. It's risky, but you're a courageous creature. You've thrown up jobs and taken your chance. Achieved freedom. Most women would have been unthinkably battered by the life you've led."

"Oh, no. You don't know Mag and Jan. You *want* to think women are being bashed in industry. And there's no *courage* in the way I have thrown up jobs. Evasion – your favourite word – of responsibility. I don't want to go on earning my living as I do at Wimpole Street. The personal interest has gone out of it——"

"Hancock's married."

"Just so. But I like his wife when her particular brand of trained intelligence, so much more painful in a woman than in a man, your kind, the kind that is unquestioningly obedient to the latest dicta of science, is in abeyance. But she is open-minded, much more open-minded than you are." – The smile was for her bad taste in abusing a pleasant occasion with unpleasant lies. – "She has no respect for, or at least is very wary of, the high-priests of Harley Street. She would like to build the same kind of world as you would like to build. Run by electricity. But she would build it on dancing as much as on science. And by the way, here's an example, perfect, of the kind of blindness a thoroughly trained, scientific mind falls into. There are, you know, 'mews' in Wimpole Street, mostly let to poor people because few of the doctors have carriages

and some, of course, now, have cars. Well, when first she dawned as a Wimpole Street wife she visited the mew belonging to the house. Wasn't that nice of her ? And called on me in the office to tell me about it. Sat down and began, and went off into one of the queer little attacks of laughter with which she prefaces an amusing communication and that screw up her face as if she were in acute pain. Mental, critical laughter. So I knew I was not going to be able to agree. Because her kind of criticism and your kind of criticism of people who live in a different world is bound to be negligible. So I was free to be tormented by the spectacle of two worlds in collision. Dreadful, she found these poor people, and repeated *Dreadful*, screwing up her face like someone who is being agonised by a discordant sound, but really thoroughly enjoying herself. What she found dreadful was that in their awful, hopeless circumstances they were *trusting in Providence*. 'Sitting still and trusting in *Providence*,' she wailed, and again had an enjoyable agony. She has helped them without seeing that their trust was thereby justified."

She had looked away, feeling that she would be beyond her depth if he objected with one of

his witty sarcasms and feeling at the same time a most desperate, unaccountable need to flout all evidence in this particular direction. But her mind whisked off and listened again to Amabel glowingly speaking of asking God to tea, not to consult Him but to share with Him her joy that could be expressed only in radiance and song . . . and came back just in time to break across whatever it was he was saying – with the manner he used when responding, resignedly, to obstinate blindness, eyes fixed on a distant object at which he was not looking, lips compressed, narrowing his voice – with a remark that seemed to come to her out of the surrounding air :

"I know what you mean. Earthquakes. Famine. Hideous wholesale accidents. And what Englehart calls with such gusto 'Industrial Maladjustments,' all those things that make humanity look so helpless and make all you people call for a combined effort of human intelligence. Which may be all right. But death doesn't matter. And what I mean about these perhaps not highly intelligent people who trust in Providence is that they would go under still trusting : 'Though Thou slay me' . . ."

"The personal interest," she pursued hurriedly, reflecting that she could not tell what she really believed beyond the deep necessity for flouting evidence, "is largely gone and the life does not use me. But every other way of living I can think of takes away something essential. Any kind of responsible work would. It may be wrong to evade responsibility. But I must. That's why I can't write for *The New Universe*. Even if, as you say, I could, and they would have me. It would mean taking sides."

"You'll have to, in the end. Even Miretta can't browse all over the field for ever. It's committing yourself you're afraid of. Taking definite steps. You'll miss things. And live to regret it."

"How can one miss things?"

"Mere existence isn't life."

"Why *mere*? Most people have too much life and too little realisation. Realisation takes time and solitude. They have neither."

"You can't go through life feeling your pulse."

"I'm not one of those people who boast that outsiders see most of the game. I hate that. And it isn't true. What is true is that certain

outsiders, I don't say I'm one of them, see *all* the game. I believe that. People who have never, in your sense, plunged into life."

"Ee-yes. Books. Almost everything can be got from books. Plus imagination. I believe it's true of lots of women, it may be true of you, that homeopathic doses of life are enough. But have at least your homeopathic dose. You've had London. Enormously. But it'll end by wearing you down. You want a *green solitude*. An infant. Then you'd be able to write a book."

Tree-trunks, in woodland variety, standing in light dimmed by their full-leaved branches, came before her inward eye and the London fever in her blood longed for the touch of the moist, deep air called up by his words. And even as she thought of a little house whose little garden should lead down into a wood, she fled from it, finding it so full of his influence that there was no space wherein her own spirit could make its home. But the words settled in her mind, the promise of a bourne to which she could see no possible path.

"No economics," she said in answer to the secondary threat embodied in his offer. "Whatever I do, no economics. They shut things off."

"Right. No economics. Unless temporarily." His smile, infected with amusement and with triumph, was directed down the length of the restaurant as if addressed confidentially to a humanity wiser and more experienced than herself.

And still the words, put together with his genius for putting the right words together, went on drawing into her mind remembered moments in cool gardens and shadowy woods that were all of one quality, so that many backgrounds were competing to represent it.

"... flat in town ... leisure to write ... countryhouse visits for holidays ..." passed unsuccessfully across her preoccupation, each in turn emptied of reality by the overshadowing influence that had driven her from the green solitude.

"Middles. You've masses of material for Middles. Criticism. You could do that on your head. Presently *novel*."

The writing of a novel suggested only a pleasant, exciting, flattering way of filling a period of leisure and thereby creating more leisure. That was what it had seemed to be to all the writers she had met at the Wilsons'; and Michael had cried out against the modern

way of regarding letters as a source of wealth.

And Hypo's emphasis suggested that the hideous, irritating, meaningless word *novvle* represented the end and aim of a writer's existence. Yet about them all, even those who left her stupefied with admiring joy, was a dreadful enclosure.

She saw Raskolinkov on the stone staircase of the tenement house being more than he knew himself to be and somehow redeemed *before* the awful deed one shared without wanting to prevent, in contrast to all the people in James who knew so much and yet did not know.

"Even as you read about Waymarsh and his 'sombre glow' and his 'attitude of prolonged impermanence' as he sits on the edge of the bed talking to Strether, and revel in all the ways James uses to reveal the process of civilising Chad, you are distracted from your utter joy by fury over all he is unaware of. And even Conrad. The self-satisfied, complacent, know-all condescendingness of their handling of their material. Wells seems to have more awareness. But all his books are witty exploitations of ideas. The torment of *all* novels is what is left out. The moment you are aware of it there is torment in them. Bang, bang,

bang, on they go, these men's books, like an L.C.C. tram, yet unable to make you forget them, the authors, for a moment. It worries me to think of novels. And yet I'm thrilled to the marrow when I hear of a new novelist. Clayhanger, though I've not read it."

"He's a realist. Documenting. You'd like Bennett. Perhaps the novel's not your form. Women ought to be good novelists. But they write best about their own experiences. Love-affairs and so forth. They lack creative imagination."

"Ah, imagination. Lies."

"Try a novel of ideas. Philosophical. There's George Eliot."

"Writes like a man."

"Just so. Lewes. Be a feminine George Eliot. Try your hand."

He was setting out the contents of the cruet as if they were pieces in a game – a life-time might be well spent in annotating the male novelists, filling out the vast oblivions in them, especially in the painfully comic or the painfully tragic and in the satirists – and now moved them towards her with the air of a demonstrator intent on directing a blank and wavering feminine consciousness :

"*Middles*. *Criticism*, which you'd do as other women do fancy-work. *Infant*. NOVEL."

His voice was dropped to the very low tone it took when he discussed what he liked to believe were improprieties.

But her interest had disappeared so completely that she went off in search of it. And at once found Amabel sitting in judgment on her evening, horrified, laughing till her eyes were filled with tears.

"I'm preoccupied," she said. "Perpetually, just now, with one person."

"Unfortunate for me," he said, unmoved. "Is this Amabel?"

"It's treasure, beyond your power of diagnosis. Beyond anyone's power."

She looked at Amabel through his eyes. And saw almost everything in her escape them. Her poses and mannerisms, that were second nature, he would amusedly accept as so many biological contrivances. And if he thought her "pretty" – sacrilege, even in thought, to apply to Amabel this belittling expression that at this moment I see as part of his deliberate refusal to take any kind of womanhood seriously and is not condoned by his protesting that neither does he take himself seriously – would

play up to her as he does, as I have seen him do, with women who "exploit" themselves; subtly conveying at the same time, to the simple female he saw behind the manœuvres, that he knew what she was about and that she was doing it rather well. But perhaps he would not even think her pretty.

"Do you understand those people, I suppose there are thousands, to whom country life without a carriage is misery? For me, the country is woods and certain kinds of fields. In light. A memory, for nearly all my holidays have been at the sea. But woods, like the German woods, and the Lake District, and the Yorkshire moors, and all the country I've seen, always in company of people, mostly of people who pull up, wistfully, before a 'fine view,' have given me a homesickness. It may be that the person who insists on carriages, sees country life as country houses, wants me to feel that no country life could come up to the life we are having together in London."

"Amabel?"

"On one side it is, I've just realised, a sort of continuation of Oberland. She belongs to those people. Has a host of brothers in the Services. Titled relatives. All that sort of thing. But

she's broken away. Couldn't live the life. Imagine a girl who used to climb down out of her bedroom window to go and swim in the lake by moonlight . . . "

"Alone?"

"Of course alone. Imagine her flying downstairs in the morning, so headlong that she couldn't stop, and crashed through the glass door of the vestibule. In the afternoon the door was mended. The next morning she crashed through again."

"Excessive."

"When she was sixteen, there is a demure photograph. She was engaged for a while; to a curate. She won't wait to speak of him. And I'm not curious, only desperately interested, always, in her view of people, and I think I can see him and the way he grew smaller and smaller, until she could scarcely see him. Anyhow she made her people – all of whom she describes, by means of anecdotes, as if they were her contemporaries, so that you see them as they are, devoid of the wrappings of age and dignity; you see all round them and know exactly how they think and why they act as they do. It's rather terrible – made them send her to Paris, to study art. In speaking of

Frenchwomen her voice grows devout and because she is more Celtic than English, being partly Irish and partly Welsh, and has no sense of nationality, she became French. In manner and bearing. Her disapproval of English people is both Irish and French. In any social difficulty the Frenchwoman comes to the front. But intimately, she is Irish. Yet her brogue is as inaccurate as her French. No ear. But a strong sense of rhythm."

"What is she doing now?"

Life with Amabel, in which she was more deeply immersed than in any shared living that had fallen to her lot, passed before her inward eye defying her to select any feature that more than any other would convey to him a sense of the quality pervading every moment of it.

Even the desire to convey seemed a kind of treachery to Amabel. Yet over everything that might pass between them the spirit of Amabel would hover, distracting, demanding statement. There was in the whole of her previous experience, that with all its restrictions of poverty and circumstance had seemed to him so rich and varied and in many respects so enviable, nothing that could compare with what Amabel had brought. Nothing could be

better. No sharing, not even the shared being of a man and a woman, which she sometimes envied and sometimes deplored, could be deeper or more wonderful than this being together, alternating between intense awareness of the beloved person and delight in every aspect, every word and movement, and a solitude distinguishable from the deepest, coolest, most renewing moments of lonely solitude only in the enhancement it reaped by being shared.

If by some wordless magic she could convey to him the quality of that moment, coming in the midst of a conversation lasting for the whole of a Sunday morning since their waken-

ing and seeing with the same eyes at the same moment through the large uncurtained window the wet grey roofs across the way – the Sunday following the evening at Mrs. Bellamy's gathering where we were separated and mingling in various groups and observing the drama as one person after another " took the floor " and expressed views, and suddenly met and were both filled with the same longing, to get away and lie side by side in the darkness describing and talking it all over until we suddenly should sleep without any interval of going off into the seclusion of our separate

minds – and had been broken into by the shared events of our picnic lunch on the floor and afterwards had gone on further and further from its origin until Amabel had sought out, to illustrate the world as it had shown itself to her in childhood, that little book of verses with coloured prints, lovely, deep in colour and simple in design, and as I looked at it, while she hunted for another, I leaned my head back and for a few seconds was asleep for the first time in broad daylight, and woke so utterly refreshed that I said without thinking : This is the birthday of the world, and, while she flew to fling herself down at my knees, I was back in the moment of seeing for the first time those flower-beds and banks of flowers blazing in the morning sunlight, that smelt of the flowers and was one with them and me and the big bees crossing the path, low, on a level with my face. And I told her of it and that it must have been somewhere near my third birthday, and her falling tears of joy and sympathy promised that never again should there be in my blood an unconquerable fever.

" She's very wary and a little scornful of all my people. Of all those I hand out. Wary of souls. Thinks the soul secondary. Coloured.

Almost visible. Almost *fat*. The spirit is form. Original form. God. But really I think it's respectable, middle-class people she finds so laughable and intolerable. I think it must be. When I talk to her about my friends and my sisters and their husbands, though she was thrilled by Harriett's Canadian life, taking in 'roomers,' and her life in Cuba, riding about and growing pineapples, she is at once on the defensive. It may be that when I am trying to *describe* anything in return for all she has told me, she is bored by my *style*, because it becomes an imitation of hers – which I admire but which is a method of expression that does not belong to what I want to convey and so conveys nothing at all. You see she has been talking all her life and has all her formulas ready-made at the tip of her tongue, and I've been silent nearly all my life and when she looks at me as if she wanted to say what are all those people to me, pats her hair and hides her eyes with her lashes as if to conceal, or reveal, her lack of interest, and tightly folds her lips together as if keeping back something she won't let herself say, she is really suffering from my insincerity."

"What is her way of describing people?"

"But now and again I can strike her note by what at the time seems a kind of inspiration, but really is the result of being with her. For instance, it occurred to me to convey the idea of somebody by saying on the spur of the moment that the story of David and Bathsheba was the only scandal he knew. She loved that. We both did. Had to stifle the yells objected to by the woman in the room above mine who finds it trying enough that we talk from after dinner until the small hours."

"That was bright of you, Miriam."

"Not at all. He is that kind of man, and I saw him, for a moment, in her terms. I can't see my *bourgeoisie*, from whom I have fled and fly, in any terms. But don't imagine she is merely witty. She can be, if she wishes to. But has several ways of repenting it. And buffoonery, which I love and excel in, shocks her beyond words. So I usually refrain. When I break out because I must, she watches me with affectionate indulgence. She is witty with her man. Because it is the only way of amusing him and filling the intervals. Tells him tales, amusing tales throwing light on people, enlarging his sense of people."

"Scheherazade."

"Incongruities amuse her. She can make them amuse me, but has to wait for me to see the point and I can't, yet, for long, or with any real satisfaction, keep my eye on that way of looking at things. I am distracted by attending to her technique and by the sense that there is something about all these people that is independent of her and outside her knowledge, something they can't express either to her or to themselves and that I share and yet, when I am with her, I feel it is something we ought to shake off and I know that for them as well as for me the memory of her will be a challenge they can never get behind."

"Is she pretty?"

"She denies it. It's useless to ask me. Her sense of incongruity is well fed because everyone in the house loves her and confides in her. She brings it all to me. Without any sense of betraying them and simply because she loves to watch people living and to share the spectacle. But it's only incidentally that they and their affairs entertain us. She will come in hysterical over some incident or other and presently describe, giving everyone the same voice. She can't imitate. But usually . . ."

He had made a remark seeming to come

from far away, and inaudible because she was deafened by the shame of the realisation that in a moment she would have been telling him of their silences, trying to tell him of those moments when they were suddenly intensely aware of each other and the flow of their wordless communion, making the smallest possible movements of the head now this way now that, holding each pose with their eyes wide on each other, expressionless, like birds in a thicket intently watching and listening ; but without bird-anxiety.

" It has just occurred to me that birds, sitting side by side with their sideways eyes, are *seeing* each other. Er – well . . . she describes her own people racily, in a rather nice class-dialect. Not either of those that keep the muscles of the face almost unmoved. The one that turns 'er' into 'ah': matah, patah, Africah, opening the mouth. Not *A*ya-fr'ca, with the teeth closed."

" How does she make all these boarding-house people love her ? "

" By loving them. She has the most real rare love for the essential human being. Even for the people she sees through. And a deep, unusual respect and solicitude. For what to

you is nothing or next to nothing : the personal life in everybody. She must already have more individuals, more personal lives, clear and vivid in her consciousness, than most people have muddled and dull in their consciousnesses in a whole life-time. Like a confessor. She confesses everything, the most impossible things. That's why I love her ; for her courage."

"You make me jealous. You've never been moved about me."

"Oh, I have. But it is so utterly different. There's a barrier. Less with some men than with most. But always there. Amabel agrees. Is always uneasy, even when blissfully happy, with her man."

"Men and women are incompatible. It's one of life's little difficulties. How does she account for her uneasiness ?"

"She has a kind of affection for it. Regards the colossal unawareness of a man as an amiable defect. But she agrees, although she finds it also screamingly funny, that the way all down the ages men have labelled their sexual impulses 'woman' is quite monstrous. We spent an evening and half a night thinking out a world in which men should be properly

educated. Very stern, detached priestesses for youth. Stern artists."

"No priests?"

"They were a difficulty. Which in the end we left. The dedicated priestesses would, of course, have to acquire their own education and experience. They would have to be specialists and not specialists, something more easy of achievement for women than for men."

"Have you told her about me?"

"I've hinted at you. She demurs. Hesitates. Not through jealousy. But although she has a horror of *les pieds jaunes de veilles filles* she won't admit that I'm qualifying to join that army. Thinks I don't need experience and should make a good thing of being an invalid on a sofa for the rest of my life, talking and being talked to."

"That's great nonsense. She's surrounding you too much. What you want is to take hold of life as she has done. Things won't *come* to you."

"But they do. Over and over again, just as I've learned to be happy with nothing, they have come. Given me something I wanted and disappeared."

"You have shoved them away."

"To get back."

APPROACHING the house that now was nothing but a casket for Amabel, her thoughts returned to him gone away with a shadowy idea of her quality and a definite picture of two young women engrossed in one of those mysterious sudden intimacies that precede the serious affairs of life and end, " at the touch of reality," as swiftly as they had begun. She had told him nothing of Amabel seriously investigating Socialism, taking it in her stride, approving, accepting. Going to suffrage meetings, being converted by the lacy, delicate old-fashioned ladyhood of Mrs. Despard to militarism, writing at once to her people, of their immediate stoppage of her allowance and her weeks of work as Mrs. Bailey's drudge, from six in the morning to nine at night, of the rescuing brother, and the way she now lived in her room with her books and her Empire china on almost nothing but bread and milk.

The story would have fired him. But it seemed secondary to what she had tried to tell.

"WE don't want you to go, dearest. We'll be dwedfully lonely when you're gone."

The golden evening had not lasted long enough to attain the distances of the room that came in sight as she rose unsteadily from her chair by the fireside. They looked cold and morning-like, left with this morning's influence upon them, away in the time before her arrival ; waiting for to-morrow.

Hypo got up with the light little hoisting movement that landed him poised in readiness to turn in any direction.

"Yes," he said, belatedly extending a judicial finger : "Susan's right. Wisdom's the only way with colds, Miretta. You've been no end good. And if we're not firm *now*, you'll go on out-doing yourself until the smaller hours and wake shattered. We don't want you to wake shattered."

Moving backwards towards the door with her eyes on the two who together made all she was leaving, she saw rising in her mind's eye behind them and this room they had made, their other rooms, their earlier selves, back and back, a single clear pattern of endeavour and achievement. Never before in their close presence had their past presented itself for

contemplation. It was bringing sadness into this small farewell, giving it a kind of finality. She had rounded the angle and reached the door and they had come forward from the room's centre that now was out of sight, and were leaning side by side over the back of the settee, seeing her off, turned towards her with their mystery, a circle drawn about them and their life of linked experience that none could enter.

"Good-night then, darlings," she said lightly. Sleep thickened her voice. Solitude, pouncing upon her from the empty lounge, brought to-night no promise of to-morrow.

"That's the right sound for to-night, Miriam. It's that wise whisky. You'll be snoring in a trice."

And to-night the bright fire warming the fresh air of her room was not a mere after-thought of the one downstairs. Its sprouting flames claimed attention like a host welcoming a guest arrived for the evening. And the familiar room seemed strange, newly-seen, refusing to be focused without inspection. She moved from part to part, half expecting a hitherto unnoticed door that would open upon an unknown scene. Foremost in her mind was the shapely little blaze to which in a

moment she turned back. The many-clawed flames dancing upon the black upper surfaces of the lumps whose undersides were mingled in the fiery central mass, jigging, shuddering, as if trying to wrench themselves free and escape up the chimney, were like *holly-leaves*.

Within the small pang of delight in the recognition of the nature of a superficial resemblance she had noted a thousand times without finding a name for it, was disquietude. In some subtle way whose fruits were uncertain she was different from the one who in the past had ignored the flames escaping upwards to concentrate upon the glowing interior : its caverns and its molten distances.

But since the early days there had not been many open fires burning freely, offering themselves in quietude, for contemplation. In Hanover, the porcelain stoves. At Banbury Park, slow fires carefully banked. At Newlands and in the houses of friends, large fires that were an inseparable part of the ceaseless magic behind the coming and going of events and moods. At Wimpole Street no coal fires save the one in Mr. Hancock's room whose genial glow seemed to emanate from and call attention to his kindly presence. . . .

The thought of fires at home recalled little but the remembered comfort of winter warmth.

Alone in the doorway of a downstairs room, with the dark hall and the endless staircase behind her, she stood looking into heaven. On the hearth, within the glow of a wide flameless fire whose radiance came out into the twilight unhampered by the high guard standing like a fence all round the nursery fire and keeping it far away, stood a copper kettle, quiet and bright and beautiful, telling, more plainly than a voice could speak, of the world surrounding the uncertainties of nursery life, kind and careful and peaceful and full of love and forgiveness, now, when no one was there, and making her know that this was what it really was when everyone was there.

Farther on, again from the doorway of an empty room, but from the known midst of the heaven of downstairs life, from the midst of joyful confident possession of the beloved house and garden, one other fire : wide and clear behind polished brass bars, radiant rose and gold against the pure cream and turquoise of the tiles whereon, just inside the marble rim of the hearth, in the combined rapturous light thrown back by the high walls with their pale

delicately blended ivory and blue, of fire and the chandelier's bright blaze softened by globes of patterned amber and rose and primrose, and the festal beams of the candles shining down from the high, mirrored girandoles, the square-shouldered bottle of chartreuse stood warming its green mystery.

Only these two ; glowing eternally.

From the undesired effort of recalling more than these spontaneous offerings of memory that promised if she lingered with them to recall in perfect fullness the years lying beyond the barrier raised by the horror that had wrenched her life in twain, her mind slipped back to the holly-leaves, remarking that unawares, in the recent past, she had rounded an unseen corner, grown observant and therefore detached. Even here, in this house. To-night, for the first time, her separate existence was consciously prevailing against its glamour, reaching forward away from it to something that would set it in the past.

The gift of the third reprieve that for this evening at least had restored to her the self that since his near approach had almost slept in his presence. A self unhappy, yet full of a strange inexhaustible joy that at this moment

was celebrating the foiling of her enterprise.

Yet who could know, who could say? These foilings might be challenges to determination, perversity of fate to be overcome. *No.*

Who could know, who could say?

To regard them as the work of "chance" would be to ignore their strange punctuality that seemed like blessed evidence of purpose at work. But to follow these hints at all costs would be to become definitely religious. And to what system of religion could she definitely belong? Everywhere was darkness and challenge. Right and wrong, pointing now this way and now that, offered no help.

The brush, rhythmically moving through the length of her hair from the warm roots to where the ends spread outwards away from it and crackled in the air, worked on in the void that already had driven the evening far away. Glancing for reassurance into the mirror lit softly from above by a frosted bulb, she met eyes that were not those she knew when, coming suddenly upon them in solitude, she caught, just before recognition and the direct gaze, a distant, serene preoccupation like that of a stranger passing in the street. These eyes were caught still glowing with the radiance of

social happiness that in a moment vanished to give place to the troubled gaze of one considering a single thought now beating up from the fullness of these recent years that had seemed to bury all that went before : what would life amount to if these links were severed ?

Amabel. But Amabel will move on. And remain with me for ever, a test, presiding over my life with others. She stands permanently in my view of life, embodying the changes she has made, the doors she has opened, the vitality she has added to my imagination of every kind of person on earth. And stands, too, insisting on marking the boundary, where she falls short and is in awe of me : of my " wisdom " and, strangely, the strangest of all her ascriptions ; of my " gift of speech."

She adores people. Turns them inside out, changes them and moves on, to other people. Basil's friend, already, having seen some of her letters to Basil, is at her feet. An old, distinguished man, running all his life in a single, distinguished groove. And now, at the end of it, confiding, confessing, facing judgment on his lifelong unconscious mental and moral blindness, judgment that emanated from her of itself.

Above her affectations and poses. Above her lies which she admits, and yet claims truthfulness. And is truthful.

Truthful English people are untruthful because they don't know themselves, self-conscious because they don't know themselves. And don't love as Amabel loves. Yet there is something they know and share all the time even in their most formal relationships. A deep, common understanding existing at the heart of English hypocrisy that makes it a relief to turn from her to people who fall so far below her native standards. A deep quality that comforts.

It had been present at home, a tolerant, liberal atmosphere in a conservative home, unrecognised until it was left behind. In the English girls in Hanover, in the Pernes, unconsciously prevailing over the horde of raw girls from 'Olloway, 'Ighbury, 'Ackney, 'Arringay and 'Ornsey, English too, but seeming of a different race from those who lived on the southern side, with its soft-sounding names . . . Sydenham . . . Wimbledon . . . Richmond . . .

In the Corries. In the Orlys and Mr. Hancock and the majority of their patients.

In all kinds of Oberlanders . . . of all classes ?

And all the others, the German girls and the north-country Brooms, Irish Julia Doyle, the Tansley Street people and Michael and radical Mag and cynical Jan, had been adventures outside the world where that deep quality persisted.

But the old-world people, newly-dear since Oberland, can be lived with only at the cost of pretending to think as they do. Not to think, but to live entirely in reference to tradition and code. Sooner or later they discover that you belong mentally elsewhere as well as to them, and you become an object of suspicion.

And the anarchists and Lycurgans bring sooner or later the feeling of living in a void.

Yet if the links with them were cut, there was no life ahead.

Only the lonely joy that comes and goes.

The air was growing still. The fire had died down. Marking an end. Taking the evening away while still it stood on the horizon.

The little bed was chill, and when the light went out the darkness glowed a feverish red.

All my life, since the beginning, I've left things standing on the horizon.

The two big Eckersleys, Selwyn and Mark,

great big men out in life – but they must have been in their early twenties, not much older than Sarah and Eve – big and kind, going gently about and talking in deep voices, gently, surrounded by the darkness of their unknown lives, playing card-games with Sarah and Eve in the drawing-room on Boxing Day. Trying to think of things to say to the children, Miriam and Harriett. When Selwyn asked me if I'd taken part in the church decorations it was because I felt while I stared at him that his idea of church had nothing to do with my experiences of All Saints, that nobody who had not been to All Saints and heard Harry Dancey play the organ, knew anything about church ; that I saw, for ever, Harriett and me, the year before, pushing the wheelbarrow to the church-room full of sooty, bitter-smelling evergreens and said " I'm going to," and realised, as soon as I'd spoken, that Christmas was over, and glared at him and saw him blush and wonder if the child was an idiot, and went on speaking to him, in my mind, to get past the awful shame, telling him he shouldn't suddenly speak because he thought he ought to say something to his hosts' smaller daughters, and that the time he thought it might please me to be asked about

was *still there*. But it wasn't, and, when I realised that, I felt hopelessly guilty and sad. And yet comforted by *knowing* that I rejoiced in things, even when I took no part, more deeply than the others. So much, that though I missed them when they came I still rejoiced and imagined I hadn't missed them.

Mother would give me the invitations to children's parties to answer and tell me to answer them and I would read "requests the pleasure of the company of" beautifully printed on a glazed card, and "Dancing 8–12" again and again and go off into dreams, and only remember to answer when the day before the party suddenly arrived ; and all the while the party itself stood in my mind, left there, in exactly the same place on the horizon as when I had first contemplated it. I put things on the horizon and leave them there.

"Quite so, Miriam," he would say, and ultimately turn away. But he doesn't yet know, to the full, all the discrepancies. I do. I am the guilty party, because I know them and keep them from him. Let him think I fully believe in his and Alma's new social order. Does Alma fully believe it ? Did she license us against her personal beliefs ? On principle ?

Warmth crept into her limbs. Through the darkness that now was cool and black she watched again the strangeness of this afternoon's sea-shallows encroaching upon lying snow. The sight of it had stemmed his discourse and in that moment of side-by-side pause and observation there had seemed to be a future of side-by-side. It was only in being physically or mentally confronted that the barriers rose. Agreement of mind or body would be treachery and disaster. Not to any person but to something of which he was unaware. To join forces with him and appear fully to accept his point of view for the sake of the experience and the enhancement of personal life it would bring, would be treachery . . . to him and to life ?

I'm a free-lover. Of course I'm a free-lover. But not his. On the horizon.

Yet in that moment by the sea, after his voice had sounded his affectionate delight and approval of the unusual spectacle, there had been a feeling of innocence that could face the spheres. For a long moment they had stood, watching the way each fan-shaped shallow spread slowly forward and ate with its bubbled edge a little farther into the snow than the last.

There had been something else. The sudden thought, during that moment when he had forgotten both himself and her, of Alma, of the innumerable sharings they must have had of things come upon suddenly, in walks, in travelling together. Of Alma's capacity for pulling up, silently, and going forth in adoration and presently, very gently, paying just the right tribute.

Perhaps long married people, in the midst of their course, cannot see things together. . . . Was that what he meant when he said Alma's no good for a walk ?

Married people cannot walk together. Or only very few. The man always seems to be straining away. Sideways-a-little-ahead. So that he can see his surroundings and escape into them from the ceaseless reminder of his mirror ?

She called up married faces seen when a party of walkers were arrested and silenced for a moment by a beautiful spectacle. The sounding of the voice of either of the pair would bring to the face of the other, who for a moment had escaped into the joy given by beauty, the expression of one suddenly jerked back into himself.

But he and Alma are not deeply domesticated. They deliberately set themselves to live independently as well as together.

In a moment he was talking again, pleased and enlivened. Listening to the happiness in his voice, catching at his jests, ignoring what they held of misrepresentation and unfairness, I experienced him as so often I have seen him experienced by passing guests too much under the spell to be aware until afterwards of their own repudiations, or dissembling them in order to go on being amused, and I wondered, alone for a second with my sea and my sky limitless as they were before I had heard them scientifically defined, whether, if the future should bring times of unbroken association I could sustain, as all those about him now invariably appear to do, the only rôle that would ensure the persistence, in his voice, of self-confident happiness.

. . . *Rievaulx*. The roadway gone. Green turf and trees and space and the party scattering. Drawn forward and separated, gladly escaping from each other yet more together than when they had been walking along the road. Rounding the bend above the valley, expectant. Rievaulx suddenly there below us on the floor of the green valley. Heart-melting love and gratitude, even before I had walked on alone along the level made in the rising ground round about it like a promenade, at just the right distance for seeing this left message, and seeing at different angles the oblong of crumbling stone, arch beside arch, in each of its different perfections, to those who long ago had expressed in this perfection their own perfect certainties and their enduring joy, and to those, in whom deep down these certainties and this joy were still persisting, who had brought me to see it, and though they lingered at the far end, instead of rambling worshipfully round, and saw it only in one perspective, as if the first shock of its silent beauty were enough, had for ever seen it and would testify, if only in the tones of their voices when they spoke its name, to what they had seen.

After the too-long walk, grey sky, heavy

August trees, deepening indifference to an Abbey that must be visited and would be exhibited by Edmund, offered with an air of proprietorship. Extremity of endurance. At last the turning away from the dusty road, the end in sight, late afternoon stealing upon us, bringing back the sense of an abiding presence in people and in things, bringing the promised wealth of to-morrow to support to-day's returning wealth and setting, with the coming of the grass and the end of the sound of trudging footsteps, everyone deep in holiday. Voices, linking the party come to life in the remote stillness that made each familiar figure again miraculous ; attractive, going softly forward over the grass.

Rievaulx brought forgetfulness and a harvest of happiness. So that the party who had seen and then wandered away to seek a farmhouse tea was not the party setting out from the inn to see Rievaulx. . . .

. . . Sound of the edge of a dream crashing in the night-dark curtained room.

At whose farther end a pale glimmer came in from the little top window with its curtain drawn back. Blotted out as she watched it by a darkness, a figure close at hand.

"I'm not here," she said, searching the dreamy void for something beyond mere indignation over this adroit arrival.

"It's a wicked night. I perish with cold. You've a window wide open."

The dark obstruction became a moving shape. With a soft flop the flourished toga reached the floor.

Alienated by exasperation with the deliberate trickery, drawn by solicitude for his exposure to the cruelty of the night, she held out draperies.

It was uncanny, but more absorbing than the unwelcome adventure of her body, to be thus hovering outside and above it in a darkness that obliterated the room and was too vast to be contained by it. An immense, fathomless black darkness through which, after an instant's sudden descent into her clenched and rigid form, she was now travelling alone on and on, without thought or memory or any emotion save the strangeness of this journeying.

Whose end came in a light that seemed the pale light of dawn. She was up at the high, glimmering window, saw clearly its painted woodwork and the small blemishes upon the pane against which she was pressed ; through

which, had it been open, she felt she could have escaped into the light that had called her thither.

His relaxed form was nothing to her. A mass of obstructive clay from which the spirit had departed on its way to its own bourne. Its journey, foolishly undertaken through her fault in hiding, failing to communicate their essential unrelatedness, had been through a familiar pleasure into restful nothingness that presumably would bear the fruit he sought therefrom.

The robed figure stood over her like a short doctor : flattering, warning, trying to edit her mind. His words brought into the room the feeling of broad daylight and if now she could leap back into life, get a dressing-gown, revive the fire and play his game by launching into a discussion of possible features for *The Cosmic Rushlight*, he would be launched at once in his lately-chosen rôle of emotional detachment and free of the uncertainty that was dictating his series of tests.

For a moment unable to determine whether her impulse was heroic saintliness or base betrayal and self-interest, she hung over the possibility. But anything that conversation

might produce would be less interesting than the strange journeying whose memory clamoured to have him gone.

He was going, gathering up his toga with the movement of departure. Impossible that he should go, taking away with him, without even being aware of its presence, the soft light surrounding them by which she could see the outlines of his movements.

" I'm not here," she said abruptly as he bent towards her, and the sound of her voice went past him out into the dark spaces and left her more separated from him than in the unshared journeying.

" You'll come back," he said, standing upright. " Don't, Miretta," the word-seeking tone of everyday, with its note of protesting exposition, " *don't* attach importance to these inevitable preliminaries."

She listened for the closing of the door. It made no sound. Yet his silent coming had wakened her like the crash of thunder.

And the return of solitude and dense night darkness within which the glimmer from the far-off high window was no longer visible, banished her preoccupation with the interior reality of her adventure and left her at the

mercy of the judgment on her behaviour since like thunder his coming had awakened her, now being flung at her by consciousness. Scornful, reasonable, unanswerable.

Fully consenting to the judgment and the acid commentaries, turning back to the betrayed and banished past and forward to a horizon swept blank and featureless, she awaited the welling-up of appropriate emotion. But the power she felt the presented facts ought to wield, and might possibly yet attain, failed to emerge from them. Within her was something that stood apart, unpossessed. From far away below the colloquy, from where still it sheltered in the void to which it had withdrawn and whence it had set forth alone upon its strange journeying, her spirit was making its own statement, profanely asserting the unattained being that was promising, however faintly, to be presently the surer for this survival. Joining forces with it, using her will to banish the lingering images she felt herself sink towards sleep.

DRAWING back the curtain from the open lattice, she found in the outside scene no escape from the lifelessness of the room. The garden, sunlit beyond the shadow of the house, the blue sea behind the daffodils screening the edge of the downward slope ; expressionless.

The world was changed. And perhaps this repellent bleakness was the truth lying beneath the bright surface she had mistaken for reality.

Seeking refuge in imagined, distant scenes, she found their faces wan and glanced with dismay along the endless years to be lived out in a dead world. But even dismay failed her, remained cold and lifeless, like the features of the room.

At the edge of her circle of vision as she stood before the mirror with arms raised to her head and eyes intent upon the shaping of her hair, birds appeared, three moving specks far off in the farther corner of the scene framed by the open window. Without shifting her gaze she saw them as they came forward downwards towards the centre of the sky. In the form of an elongated triangle they flashed by near at hand and disappeared beyond the window's nearer rim. And the sight of them as they passed had smitten through her as though she were

transparent and left her thrilled from head to foot with the sense of having shared their swift and silent flight.

And as surprising and as new as this vivid experience was the way she had taken it : noting it in passing and, while exultantly her consciousness declared that last night's lonely journey through uninhabited darkness had carried her into a way of being that would find its own responses in this dead-seeming world, going on doing her hair.

AS breakfast proceeded, it seemed certain his preoccupation was not assumed. In his eyes, directly facing the morning light pouring in through the wide windows, was meditation, fusing the grey and the blue and giving them the characteristic blind gaze, caught by Ritch in the portrait, showing only a single luminously gleaming point focused upon the invisible distance wherein his thoughts were at work.

In a way that kept him all the more sharply aware of his immediate surroundings : of

Alma intent on preserving the occasion from complete silence by intermittent gay monologue to which he responded, without drawing in his distant gaze more often than was made necessary by attention to his breakfast, with brief appreciative flippancy, just enough to keep things going short of launching into table-talk ; and of herself who could not be counted upon to follow even the most unmistakable clue and had the socially inconvenient habit of going off on long journeys and leaving her thoughts in her face. . . .

She stood at the window regarding the expressionless sea, listening to the after-breakfast sounds : the whoof of the swing-door off the lounge, the banging of distant doors as the maids swiftly accomplished their upstairs work in the brief interval allowed for disturbances.

Alma came in, and as they talked she heard his voice go cheerfully humming through the lounge, and the closing of the study door.

It was now or never for the cheery greeting he did not deserve. Departing to his morning without even the usual enquiry as to how hers was to be spent, he deserved, on emerging later, to find her meanwhile returned to town.

But this morning's strange, rich harvest belonged in a sense to him, and demanded some kind of expressiveness. A handshake, a small solo dance in the window-space before the morning's separation.

Alma was going, obstructive, down the room . . . through the lounge . . . into the study. . . .

With her eyes on the inaccessible interior whence he might yet come forth before settling down for the morning, or which yet, if Alma did not stay too long, might be the scene of the dance now urgent in all her limbs and whose moment was already passing, she ran up the short flight of stairs and halted to look out through its landing window upon the neglected backward view : houses, grey seaside villas climbing the hill, a small, ancient omnibus ascending so slowly that it scarcely seemed to move ; but moving, alive.

In a moment she heard rising towards her, its repellent message a little muted by the closed door, the sound heard rapturously on so many summer mornings : music . . . a Beethoven *allegro* being wound off clear and note-perfect. The prelude to work.

Coming downstairs she saw Alma emerge

from the study and make for the servants' quarters, radiant with the certainty of a good day launched.

Aware of the futility of her action she pulled up at a bookshelf and stood surveying the tightly-packed volumes. More than ever remote and unreal were the suggestions emanating from the titles of the unread books, and for the hundredth time she wondered what it was that made so many people appear to cherish them more than anything on earth and to be unaware as they sat outside life, reading them, of the revealing aura about their persons.

Choosing a volume whose fine binding and clear letterpress set well within the wide margins of its almost square pages gave it a comforting companionable air, she carried it off and sat down with it in a window-seat and at once became aware of herself sitting there, prominent in a room she had no desire to occupy ; putting in time. She could scarcely believe it was herself who this morning, ages ago, had been up with the birds in their sky.

The memory brought her to her feet. The decorative book, abandoned in the corner, because there was no time to restore it to its

place, would be a lying testimony to an interest that had never existed.

But out in the lounge she was again held up by the barriers standing right and left within this haunted house.

On her way upstairs she breathed wider air, felt in advance the influence coming from her room of things stored there that knew her in another life. With the touch of the door-knob upon her hand came a vision of garments whose fabric and tone and make would utterly transform her and that somehow before the spring had fully come and gone she would acquire. One gown, at least, would be possible, the room announced now that she was within it: a *Viola* gown, with a yet more strange and subtle combination of colours in its embroideries than the Persian blue and green and mauve. . . .

Viola, Miss Green and Miss Jones, would let her have it, only too gladly, for gradual payments. . . . *Afraid to wake in the night because at once their hearts were beating with anxiety.*

All over England there must be people living like that. Working anxiously all day and afraid to wake at night. To be happy in the clothes they made, and not to share their perpetual anxiety, is unfair. . . .

At lunch, Alma was still radiant. Her thrilled and smiling voice, the glow that made her carefully chosen clothes seem to have assembled upon her by happy chance, her talk, leaping deftly from point to point – all these were sure testimonies to the goodness of his day.

He sat at ease, a neatly plump Silenus with intelligent brow, played upon by Alma's happy radiance. Basking, jesting to laugh and produce laughter. And, all the time, blissfully preoccupied with the sense of work well and easily done, with work ahead ?

THE sound of the opening door.

Through the window, she watched the old, lost enchantment flow back into sea and sky and garden.

" Dearest – " it was Alma, advancing swiftly down the room – " the dressmaker's arrived with her bag of tools. You'll be happy, playing alone, until tea-time ? "

Alma knew where he was, what he was doing, was quite innocently playing the part

of kind hostess providing alternatives for the central entertainment.

"I'm going out," she said, thankful, as the beating of her heart shook her voice, for Alma's experience of her varying moods, and adding – for after all it might be she who was about to play truant and he might presently be searching the house for her, cheerfully expecting the usual walk – "if Hypo won't think me unsociable."

Alma halted, as if at a loss, as if puzzled. After *years* of visits and afternoon walks. . . .

"*Oh*," she said, almost fiercely, in a tone lower and deeper than that of her daily voice and coming from the depths of a self persisting from early days but taught by life to keep out of sight, "*he* won't notice." And turned away. A gust of bitterness, sadness . . . and she was gone, as if herself fleeing before it, without another word.

He was not at work. Ostentatiously, he was making this gesture of withdrawal. Had not even given Alma a cue for one of her tactful misrepresentations.

Methodically, deliberately, he was leaving her to herself. To demonstrate a principle : elimination of the personal. She might consider

herself either the victim or the honoured partner in this demonstration for whose sake he was leaving her equally cut off from the resources of her far-away London life and from the life down here that he well knew was centred, throughout its brevity, upon himself.

Her anger ranged out over the world which was too small to contain it, out into space, vainly seeking relief.

To let it wear itself out unexpressed would be humiliation, in her person, not of herself alone, but also of something quite impersonal, sternly and indignantly demanding vengeance.

But the desire for vengeance was not in full possession, or she would now be facing him. . . . He would go on playing his part : would rise, with a cheerful impersonal greeting, describe his employment, enquire her plans. She would confront his pose until it passed from simulated concentration to simulated protest against her failure to recognise the compliment he was paying. And would presently embark on his theme : the right, intelligent way of managing life's incompatibilities. He would become affectionate, with reservations. Repulsed, he would really wish her away, would yearn for Alma and his screened inaccessibility.

And would not be capable of knowing that it was something far beyond sympathetic affection that she was desiring. Something as detached and impersonal as even he could wish : a sharing, But a sharing of intimations he refused to recognise.

He was an alien. To Alma, to any woman ever born he was an alien.

That was why last night she had voyaged away alone through the living darkness, and why at this moment her desire to face him with judgment that knew itself to come from life's infallible centre was imperfectly possessing her, half-heartedly struggling with her sense of being already far away out there in the landscape.

Yet when she shut behind her the garden door and greeted in spite of herself the air coming from over the sea, her wrath turned upon the craven feet retreating from its object.

Out of sight, wandering down the terraces, she felt anger loosen its hold. It was not anger that was noting the pitiful heads of the ranged spring flowers, swaying in the wind.

In dismay she gazed at their brief moment, their nothingness. . . . The old, immeasurable depth of the seasons had departed from

her being. She could see now, in one glance, the whole year, years, circling. And the house, invisible away behind her, meeting her imagination as it recoiled from the revelation of the flowers, had lost its solidity, become a frail and porous structure crumbling upon the plot of earth it mapped into rooms to shelter a few briefly-living people.

Half way through the jungle leading to the fence and its gate, with the sea vanished but audibly approaching, she found her thoughts turning backward with a relieving gentleness. . . . He is a sensual doctrinaire. Torn between his senses and his ideas. *Really* trying to make his liveliest senses serve his doctrines. People are nothing to him but the foolish hope of an impossible unanimity at the service of his plan. Therefore he demands stoical disregard of the personal. All his women play up to this. . . . Pretend to accept his idea of them as subsidiary. Prevent his recognition of them as a different order of consciousness. He is as fatal to the feminine consciousness as it would be, if it were articulate, to his plan. To the element in his plan which regards what is as worthless in comparison with the future as he imagines it, not seeing that in its turn it will

come under the same ban for those who care for nothing but "progress."

Here was the roadway. For the first time she was walking along it alone, disguised as a Bonnycliffer out for a constitutional, unsupported, unable at a moment's notice, to take root in this world that she knew by everlasting experience was supplying, even in a single afternoon, accommodation for roots.

The bay opened with sound : the invisible edge of the sea beating upon the beach, trying in its remembered way to bring summer to her mind ; bringing only the sense of the to and fro of its tides from coast to coast.

Into the sea's sound came another, rapidly approaching : the jingle of the coast-tram. Tinkling local sound, a reminder, coming faintly from the distance through the windows of the house on the cliff, of villa-life going on down below. But this afternoon, heard in solitude at close quarters, it hailed her from Hanover, from North London, from within the self that was unknown to those in the house on the cliff and to whom it offered the blessed refuge of its universal hospitality.

Through the sliding door she escaped into the welcome of reflected light, into an inner

world that changed the aspect of everything about her. When the tram moved off, the scenes framed by the windows grew beautiful in movement. The framing and the movement created them, gave them a life that was not the life of wild nature only. They lost their new pathos. Watching them, she was out in eternity, gliding along, adding this hour to the strange sum of her central being that now, with the remainder of the afternoon accounted for by the coast-ride and the return, looked with indifference upon the evening coming almost too soon and, although rich with a deep intensity of golden light, seeming secondary. A superfluity she could forego without loss.

IT seemed as if daylight rather than night were standing outside the drawn curtains. Yet everything was as usual. The room, the two figures, the golden light. But between them and herself was this strange numbness, complete, impossible to break, wrapping her like a cloak, pressing upon and isolating her in bleak daylight.

Time passed by, bringing no change in her condition, no lessening and no increase of this extraordinary numbness. Every sound and word and movement, even her own words and movements were coming to her as if from a distance and failing to reach her isolation. The warm richness of evening was an illusion, slain. This was normality. She must learn to endure it. To endure endless evenings stripped of evening glamour.

For the first time she was seeing herself as she had seen countless women in the past, wondering over their aridity of mind and spirit. Now she understood them, was sharing the cold clarity of their vision. Sharing their desire for an occupation for empty hands, for something to justify the space they occupied in the room and supply a screen for their thoughts and an escape from the pressure of life swept clear of the illusion of friends and festivities ; of life whose end shows clearly beyond an unvarying succession of evenings spent in knitting away the hours that led to sleep and the next day.

" Would Miriam like, should we all like, a toon, to finish the evening ? "

Looking up to follow his spectral movement

across to the shelves where the records were stacked up that belonged to the old life, she saw, between his retreating form and herself, Alma beaming a sleepy-eyed benediction upon a good day. For a moment she felt as if some word of theirs might break the power that held her. But they were too far off ; alien.

He had switched on the light and stood clear within it, signalling to her with his look of delighted guilt. Playing his foolish game.

" Something quite short, I think."

He came back down the room, casket in hand.

" Have a parting cigarette, Miretta."

The room was shut out by the darkness of his figure bent towards her, warm and near. She took the proffered cigarette and as the light flared between them and lit his flushed and guilty face, to which her eyes had turned only for curious investigation, she saw again the strange darkness of last night's voyaging. He moved away and with an icy shudder her numbness passed from her, leaving her alive, ready to plunge into the beginning of an endless golden evening ; too late. Again she was paying the price of his methodical calculations.

ALL the places she had known came unsummoned before her mind's eye with an intimate new warmth of welcome, each equally near and accessible and equally remote ; so far away that several could be focused at once, pictured for a moment in their places before they moved and mingled in a confusion of impressions all joyously claiming the same quality : a freshly-plumbed interest that promised to have increased when again she should drop back into them in an interval such as was being provided by the journey. That brought her to London without any sense of transition from one place to another.

Pulling up face to face with her hansom was one that had come from the opposite direction. Its occupant leapt forth as she leapt forth and they stood within a yard or two of each other paying their respective fares and together ascended the wide steps of number fifty-two. Last week she would have been tiresomely interested in him, disapproving or approving. Standing, if he were acceptable, in a momentary wordless communion with him, posing if he were preposterous in either of the many ways men had of being preposterous, in direct opposition to his shallow ideas.

To-day he was revelation. Without even wishing to observe, she felt him there pursuing the shape of his life that held no unshared mystery, wishing her well as she wished him well. Disadvantage had fallen from her and burden, leaving a calm delightful sense of power. Lightly she stepped across the threshold and found the familiar scene unreproachful ; shrunk in all its proportions. Immediate things had lost their hold. Going through the hall she was obliged forcibly to call her mind to them, to draw it back from where it had roved while she has stood upon the steps comfortably ignoring the revealing young man, away down the street, down through her London, her beloved territory, without let or hindrance. And instead of creeping to her accustomed place half wondering whether it were her duty to explain and risk disgrace, she was full of inward song and wishing for congratulations.

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